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# HIDDEN MUTUALITIES

## Faustian Themes in the Postcolonial

### SUMMARY

Hidden mutualities link the work of major postcolonial writers with Marlowe's drama of the Faustian pact — the manipulation of the material world in exchange for the soul — written as the 'scientific' world view was emerging which accompanied the imperial expansion of Europe and has determined the economic and social structures of the colonial and post-colonial world.

This comparative study brings together researches in widely different fields to show how *Doctor Faustus* reflects a Gnostic / Hermetic tradition marginalized within the dominant European power structures. It shows initially how these ideas were crystallized by Ficino and Pico from the available texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and how they relate to what has become known about Gnosticism and Simon Magus. Combined with the alchemical and cabalistic traditions they form a basis for the study of Renaissance 'Magus' figures such as Trithemius, Reuchlin, Agrippa, Paracelsus or Dee, who are reflected in Faust and in Shakespeare's Prospero in *The Tempest*.

The second part investigates the dual legacy of the Magus. A counterpoint between a law-governed objective material world and an occult visionary pursuit of the divine potential of the human imagination, in which the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition ironically became marginalized by the technological science it had inspired, is traced through the examples of Kepler, Fludd, Newton, Blake, Kipling, Crowley, Yeats, Pauli and Jung.

In the third part, textual analysis reveals how attention to these Faustian themes opens new critical perspectives in appreciating the works of postcolonial writers, in particular *Dimetos* by Athol Fugard, *Disappearance* by David Dabydeen, *Omeros* by Derek Walcott, and the novels of Wilson Harris, all of which stress the importance of the creative imagination over mimesis.



# HIDDEN MUTUALITIES

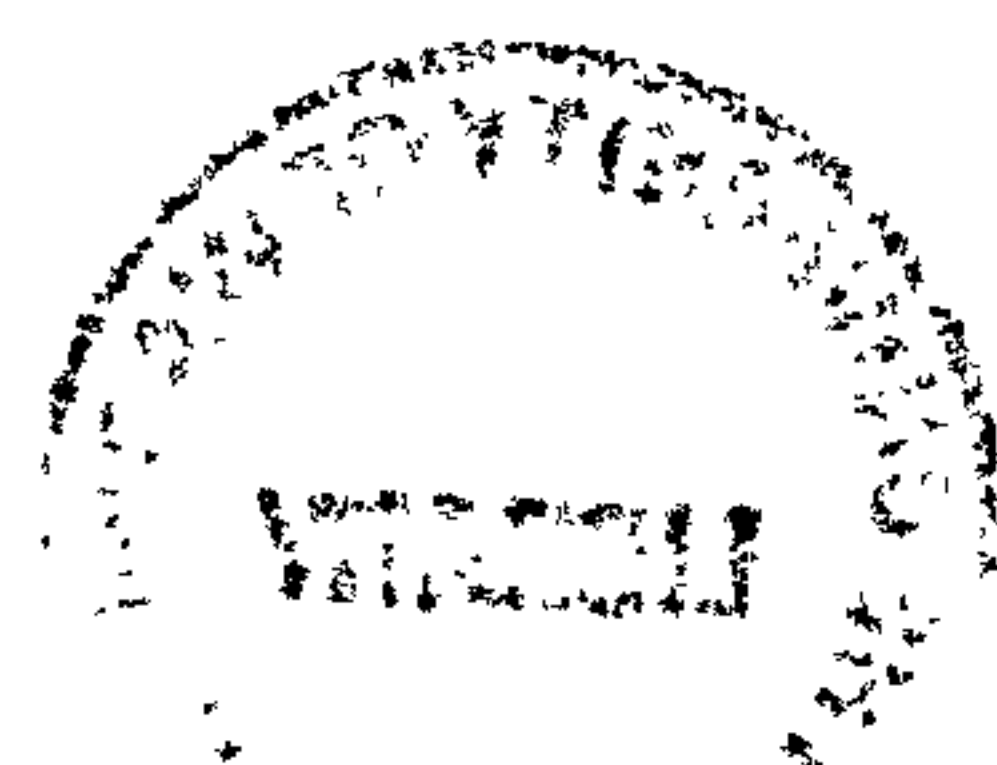
## Faustian Themes in the Postcolonial

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Apologies are due to my family, for all they have had to put up with.

I would like to dedicate this study to the memory of Pat Mitchell and Elisabeth Stopp, and to the members of Maria Veen EDG, particularly Bernd, Claudia, Oliver and Julia.

## Declaration

Earlier versions of parts of this thesis have been published in the following places:

'The Fallible Magus: Reflections of Faustus in the Image of the Engineer in Athol Fugard, David Dabydeen and Wilson Harris', Elmar Schenkel & Stefan Welz (eds), *Lost Worlds & Mad Elephants* (Leipzig Explorations in Literature and Culture 2) (Glienicke: Galda und Wilch, 1999), pp. 287-303

'Putting the Horse Before Descartes: Theory and Derek Walcott's *Omeros*', Jean-Pierre Durix (ed.), *Theory and Literary Creation* (Dijon: Centre Image/Texte/Language/Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, 1999), pp. 43-51

'The Seigniorship of Faust: Gnostic Scenery in *The Infinite Rehearsal*', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2: 1,2 & 3 (2000), 168-178



This is the start of a production of *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, performed in English by German pupils at a German secondary school (Gymnasium Maria Veen) under my direction in 1992. The part of Faustus was played by a girl, as was Mephistopheles, and the same group had previously performed in productions of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *Dimetos*, by Athol Fugard. It is a performance, then, which comprises the first level of a whole web of appearances and disappearances, correspondences and embodiments of related themes of what might be described as an infinite rehearsal. Beginning with a play that embodies one of the central myths of Renaissance European culture, the web extends through time and space to embrace the concerns of major postcolonial writers. But let us first return to that story as it appeared on the school stage.



1. Faustus (Julia Feise) and Mephistopheles (Claudia Nienhoff), Maria Veen 1992

Mephistopheles, dressed in the style of a twentieth-century religious order, promises the Renaissance Faustus power and knowledge in exchange for his soul and a life fixed within twenty-four years of time. Mephistopheles, to whom hell is a state of mind and its torments co-extensive with the limits of human brutality, holds sparklers in delight as Faustus signs away his soul and is rewarded with an illusory coronation by the Seven Sins on temporary release. In ironic counterpoint a female clown in motley twice fails to conjure out of an



empty hat before, at the third attempt, revealing silk streamers and a rabbit, but then, protesting that with her 'pickedevants' she is no boy, she is cajoled into Wagner's service with offers of foreign cash, threats of devils and finally blinding Latin science. The stable-boys too satirically highlight Faustus' bargain when they steal a conjuring book to fulfil their desire for free booze and a nude dance with the local maidens. Their reward is to be turned into chattering, braying, roaring animals by Mephistopheles.

Faustus, of course, fares little better. He is fobbed off with the current state of knowledge when he quizzes Mephistopheles on cosmology in a 'Mastermind' spotlight; Mephistopheles will not reveal to him who made the world, even when their places in the spotlights are reversed, except to say the heavens were made for man, so he must be the greater. He does, however, give Faustus a slim volume, a play called *Doctor Faustus*, when he asks for a book in which all knowledge is summed up. Finally, before the interval, the Sins are released from their cages by a leather-clad, whip-cracking Lucifer to introduce themselves to Faustus before performing a circus-mime of their natures and then leaping out threateningly at the audience, where they disperse.

The play's second half shows Faustus' progress through the world of male power. The vaguely similar male figures who, as Valdes and Cornelius, had put him on the path of magic, now reappear in successively more ridiculous guises. First, they play a cardinal and pope more interested in food, drink and the style of their wardrobe than spiritual matters. Next they are a gay emperor and his foppish friend whose desire to compare their power with their ancestors' is satisfied by a video show in which the "substantial bodies of these two deceased princes" Alexander and his paramour (bearing an uncanny resemblance to themselves) can be seen and heard — though not communicated with — posing before a sea of corpses. Their final appearance has the former pope and emperor as a simpering drag queen lasciviously licking grapes and sucking a banana which Faustus has had instantaneously air freighted from the far side of the globe. Like the horse-courser whose 'magic' horse, on which he had set such hopes, has unaccountably been transformed into a bale of straw, leaving him dripping in the pond, Faustus has found his icons of power to be nothing but men of straw.

As the play draws to its conclusion in Wittenberg, where it began, Faustus fulfils the students' request to see absolute beauty in the shape of Helen. Though a young girl (the text's 'Old Man'), a memory of Faustus' own innocence, temporarily induces a revolt against Mephistopheles' authority, a threat to "tear thy flesh" now has such physical effect that Faustus' response is to plead for it to be done to the innocent instead. Faustus' reward is a vision of Helen: there is darkness on stage. Then a single spotlight strikes an oval mirror held up by Pride which, as it slowly swivels, throws the full glare of its brilliance into Faustus' own face. The speech declaiming Helen's beauty is directed at his own lost soul. His kiss meets only glass.

The Seven Sins, released, are now the devils that will return to tear Faustus into pieces. Abandoned one by one by Wagner, the scholars, Mephistopheles and the bureaucratic angels, who pack their files, blow out their candles and remove Faustus' academic trappings, she is left, a frightened girl, cowering before the visions of blood in the sky, unable to penetrate the hardness of earth, arms outstretched in a gesture of crucifixion beneath the stars. Trapped by invisible walls, unable to dissolve into the animal or material kingdom, she waits for the macabre seven dancers and their master death to approach. The stage thunder and lightning which have been growing through the scene are now drowned out, as midnight chimes, by the spectacular storm which rages round the school, fusing the lights and sending me scurrying to switch on the emergency generator. Faustus is torn apart, her screams ending in a baby's cries, as, in darkness, the scholars describe the discovery of mangled limbs, and the final music echoes the mysterious tones that had accompanied the performance of conjuring throughout the play.

After the curtain-calls, applause, and puzzled comments on the appropriateness of the weather had been acknowledged in some embarrassment, and after the first-night party, driving home, I found the play resonating in my memory with others we had produced — *The Tempest* and *Dimetos* — and the conviction crystallised that here, on the stage and in the lives that converged on it, in the texts and in the minds from which they emerged, there was a story that needed to be told, and connections, or 'Faustian themes' which demanded to be given some form of articulation.

This first intuition, founded on theatrical and interpersonal experiences, provides the impulse for the investigations which follow. It will become clear that the Faust motif resonates far beyond the works in which it is found. The first chapter indeed traces the antecedents of the Faust figure through the Renaissance fascination with the Hermetic writings to their origins in the belief systems of cosmopolitan Gnosticism in the early Christian period. Gnosticism brackets widely divergent ideas, but has a common denominator in a sense of duality: that within each individual there is a spark of divine potential distinguishable from the appearances of organic process and the material world. The Gnostics were subject to fierce persecution by Church and state, which regarded them as a profound challenge to their authority as sole mediators of divine salvation and civil power. The Gnostic seeker was forced to pursue the goal of divine knowledge in secret. It was an 'occult' pursuit of spiritual wealth implying influence over the material world, by means of magic, alchemy and cabala. This Gnostic / Hermetic tradition survived to speak of a marginalized Otherness counterpointing the official history of Christian Europe.

At a moment of ecclesiastical crisis it threw up the Faust story, with its outlandishly familiar theme of a bargain to allow manipulation of the material world at the cost of the soul, just as that material world moved out of the shadows of religious dogma to become the object of Enlightenment. Science was able to progress once the environment appeared to have been freed from contamination by projections from the human psyche. The occult traditions themselves were annexed to allow the development of technology. The Magus metamorphosed into the engineer, while the question of cost was deferred. And yet paradoxically the occult tradition of Gnosticism continued its underground existence, now with the nagging reminder that the material world was after all the imperfect projection of the mind, and that its elevation to the status of objective reality meant the selling of the soul, the divine spark of creative imagination. The second part of this study shows that whereas previously the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition had been the marginalized Other of the Christian imperium, it now took on a similar role vis-à-vis the simultaneous mercantile domination of the realm of the material and the realms of the globe, a masculine discourse of power which



cloaked itself in metanarratives of progress and utopian perfectibility. This is the ground of the mutualities between the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition and the experience of colonized peoples outside the European power centres, which forms the subject of Part Three.

As a result of its marginal status, the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition as a coherent line of discourse has been comparatively neglected. Indeed many people are unaware of its existence. Partly this is because it has not drawn attention to itself as a self-conscious tradition. One of the rare studies of Gnosticism and its literary expressions is A.D. Nuttall's *The Alternative Trinity*, in which he points out, with reference to Blake:

The more one reads, the clearer it becomes that the tracing of close verbal connections is in a way beside the point, that we are dealing with a *philosophia perennis* or persistent body of live thought, maintained both by writing and by enthusiastic talk continuously through the centuries.<sup>2</sup>

Showing its persistence was the aim of a series of lectures given in Amsterdam in 1994 collected under the title *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, which also confirms that "the academic study of these developments is a comparatively recent phenomenon," and goes on to assert:

Even more importantly, it has become increasingly clear that the scholarly recovery of the "esoteric" traditions may actually force us to question basic received opinions about the foundations of our present culture.<sup>3</sup>

This is already being done in two important ways. Firstly, given the breakdown of the old metanarratives as part of the 'postmodern' phenomena,<sup>4</sup> there has been a revision of the role of the imagination, which has revealed fascinating parallels with the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition. These were first set out by Jean Starobinski in 'Jalons pour une histoire du concept d'imagination',<sup>5</sup> which traces a line from the Greeks via Giordano Bruno to the Romantics and Jung. More recently they have been the subject of Richard Kearney's study *The Wake of Imagination*. The other questioning of received opinions is through the work of writers from outside metropolitan Europe in a wide variety of cultures all affected by the currents of

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<sup>2</sup> A.D. Nuttall, *The Alternative Trilogy: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake*, p. 218

<sup>3</sup> van den Broek, Roelof & Wouter J. Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, p. viii

<sup>4</sup> As Anne McClintock points out apocalyptically, alluding to Walter Benjamin's 'Agesilaus Santander', "The collapse of both capitalist and communist teleologies of 'progress' has resulted in a doubled and overdetermined crisis in images of future time. [...] The storm of 'progress' had blown for both communism and capitalism alike. Now the wind is stilled, and the angel with hunched wings broods over the wreckage at its feet." (Barker, Hulme & Iversen (eds.), *Colonial discourse / postcolonial theory*, p. 265)

<sup>5</sup> This is a chapter which forms part of a longer essay, *La Relation Critique*.

postcolonial change and the neo-imperialism of globalization.<sup>6</sup> Their symptoms of unease, which have found expression in a renewed engagement with myth, magic and the world of the invisible (for instance in a curious revival of the angel motif) — in short impatience with conventional realist orthodoxies — are hard to fit into the framework of theory that has developed in postcolonial studies over recent years.<sup>7</sup>

In the successful project of the first phase of postcolonial studies, accompanying the process that can be summed up in the phrase 'decolonizing the mind', postcolonial theory established the true differences between the colonizers and the colonized by stressing the polarities dividing the centre and the margin and showing how they related to that between the Self and the Other. But the polarity between Self and Other, the need to establish the legitimacy of one culture in opposition to others, while it has provided an essential platform for previously marginalized societies to be taken seriously, now threatens to lead into a cul-de-sac of sterility and dissociation. In stressing the importance of the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, Homi Bhabha points out that there is a 'Third Space' of enunciations which denies the apparent fixity, not only of cultures themselves, but of ways of making statements about them. Harris describes it as "a certain void or misgiving attending every assimilation of contraries", for in that space all the old certainties founded on oppositions, which may have been shaped by our education or a whole life's experience of advantage or disadvantage, begin to fall away. This is bound to create misgivings. It is, after all, (and here Bhabha quotes Fanon), a "zone of occult instability" which occurs whenever there are profound cultural changes. This is the case in the aftermath of colonialism. Bhabha writes:

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<sup>6</sup> That the two are related is confirmed by Kearney: "For it is certain that the Third World cultures of Africa, Asia, Latin-America provide us with *different* stories of imagination, with rich narratives hitherto unexplored and unimagined by Western civilization. Here again we are reminded that the poetico-ethical imagination we are advancing is above all empathic imagination: versatile, open-minded, prepared to dialogue with what is not itself, with its other, to welcome the difference (*dia-legein*), to say even to its sworn adversary — *mon semblable, mon frère*. (Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, p. 392 — author's emphasis)

<sup>7</sup> I am aware that here, and in my title, I have entered a terminological minefield, where "a healthy scepticism towards the rapid and often merely fashionable adoption of easy labels" (Barker, Hulme and Iversen, *Colonial discourse / postcolonial theory*, p. 4) is advisable. I have used the term 'postcolonial', as they do, to be more than a temporal marker ('post-colonial') and "to indicate the analytical concept of greater range and ambition" of referring to the complex of relationships affected by colonialism and its aftermath. Wilson Harris's term 'cross-cultural' is in many ways preferable, but not historically specific. 'Commonwealth' has probably gone out of use because of its exclusively British connections and its connotations of a quasi-political organization. This may evolve one day, of course, to become a cultural common-wealth, a play on words more apparent in the German words *reich* and *Reich*.



It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory [...] may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' — the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space — that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves.<sup>8</sup>

Harris's 'Third Space', according to Bhabha, emerges from a key recognition: what seems to be the dominant culture contains within itself marginalized, eclipsed and suppressed seeds which may address the concerns of postcolonial societies, and break what Harris calls the 'tautology of power'.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise, Harris fears, we remain trapped in a nihilistic vicious circle driven by what he terms 'self-righteous deprivation' on the one hand and resentful guilt on the other. The Third Space might call upon the resources of marginalized Gnosticism<sup>10</sup> as part of a cross-cultural breach of nihilism:

For the gnostic (the gnostic Christian or the gnostic pagan who dreams of extra-human parents interwoven with cosmic enmity and abandonment in Orphic song as much as in the song of ancient Mexico) the consent of a parent-creator (who may reconcile the vagaries and contradictions of parentage) is an invaluable quest within the language of time. Indeed it is essential if the Soul of tradition is to resume its voyage out of the past and into the unknown future.<sup>11</sup>

The contribution this study can make is to throw light on how the Gnostic / Hermetic crux that emerges in *Doctor Faustus* can relate to the postcolonial concerns expressed by writers like Athol Fugard, David Dabydeen, Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris, and discover the basis for Harris's cautious optimism:

Gnosis then is steeped in densities and bodies of knowledge through which we hope to pass — changed in heart and conscience and mind — into unknown, parenting futures that may bring justice at last.<sup>12</sup>

A task such as that attempted here requires a broad, comparative cultural sweep. This study is therefore not archaeological or classificatory research-in-depth within a severely restricted specialization. This essential task can be left to the experts working in their fields.

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<sup>8</sup> Homi Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory' in *The Location of Culture*, pp.38f.

<sup>9</sup> "Concepts of invariant identity function in the modern world as a block imperative at the heart of cultural politics. The oppressor makes this his or her banner. The oppressed follow suit. *Such is the tautology of power.*" (Harris, 'The Fabric of the Imagination', Anna Rutherford (ed.), *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial*, p. 18 — author's emphasis)

<sup>10</sup> Gnosticism would, in this case, be an example of the way "age-old myth, however apparently lost, gestates in the unconscious and may evolve and return with new, renascent complications and edges". (Ibid. p. 26)

<sup>11</sup> Wilson Harris, 'Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition', Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 193

My intention instead is to 'stand on the shoulders of giants', using their conclusions to make connections and open pathways that might otherwise remain closed. Susan Bassnett has described how Wole Soyinka had his lectures on African Literature excluded from the English Department in Cambridge in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> The story elucidates well the pernicious effects of dogmatic restrictiveness, an illustration in miniature of the hegemonic pretensions of dominant cultures. For this reason Bassnett sees in postcolonial studies some of the most fruitful comparative approaches, but she also points to the growing importance of translation studies. Translation's recognition of the essential differences between languages and its need to negotiate to discover a mutuality between them to cross otherwise insurmountable frontiers might serve as an image to characterize my approach.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 193

<sup>13</sup> Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, p. 73

Part I

Potent Arts

## Chapter One

### The Gnostic / Hermetic Tradition: Simon Magus to Faust

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The famous biologist and historian of Chinese science and civilisation Joseph Needham pinpointed a moment of bifurcation in the history of ideas when so-called Western science began to take a radically different path from that of the East. He associated this change of direction with an altered conception of 'law' as applied to the natural world. "There is no doubt that the turning-point occurs between Copernicus (1473 to 1543) and Kepler (1571 to 1630)",<sup>1</sup> writes Needham, and he is echoed by numerous historians of science and culture.<sup>2</sup> Until that time, Chinese, Indian and Arab science had been superior in almost every respect to what had been done in Europe. From then on, however, 'true science' was to develop through Galileo and Newton so that, as Needham complains, the encyclopedias of Chinese knowledge could be dismissed by Lévy-Brühl as "nothing but balderdash".<sup>3</sup> The essential difference is grounded in interpretations of the connections between elements in the universe. Needham explains:

I am anxious to get this point of divergence perfectly clear. Chinese coordinative thinking was *not* primitive thinking in the sense that it was alogical or pre-logical chaos in which anything could be the cause of anything else, and where men's ideas were guided by the pure fancies of one or another medicine-man. It was a picture of an extremely and precisely ordered universe, in which things 'fitted', 'so exactly that you could not insert a hair between them'[ ... ]. But it was a universe in which this organisation came about, not because of fiats issued by a supreme creator-lawgiver, which things must obey subject to sanctions impossible by angels attendant; nor because of the physical clash of innumerable billiard-balls in which the motion of the one was the physical cause of the impulsion of the other. It was an ordered harmony of wills without an ordainer; it was like the spontaneous yet ordered, in the sense of patterned, movements of dancers in a country dance of figures, none of whom are bound by law to do what they do, nor yet pushed by others coming behind, but cooperate in a voluntary harmony of wills.<sup>4</sup>

From this passage it is clear that the divergence can be described as ethnocentric, and that it roughly coincides not only with a drive towards exploration and expansion in Europe, but also with a rapid acceleration of technological progress through which the cultures outside

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<sup>1</sup> Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 2, p. 540

<sup>2</sup> Notably Vickers in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance* (dedicated to Needham) or Foucault in *Les Mots et les Choses*

<sup>3</sup> Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 2, p. 285



Europe could be dominated and physically or economically subdued. It was a discourse of power. Lewis Mumford refers to Kepler's long-neglected *Somnium* when he points out:

Kepler, born a century after Copernicus, but only a few years after Galileo, embodied in his own person the three great aspects of the New World transformation: the scientific side, in his classic discovery of the unexpectedly ellipsoid course taken by the planets around the sun: the religious side, in his open admiration of the sun itself and the starry sky as a substantial visible equivalent of the fading Christian Heaven: and finally, his untrammelled technical imagination; since in a day of sailing ships and short-range, inaccurate cannon he dared to depict in vividly realistic terms the first power-driven journey to the moon.<sup>5</sup>

This passage, where it refers to the sun, is not merely describing the mighty heliocentric conception of the universe, but implies that the sun as monarch and central law-giver is comparable to a metropolitan centre around which a 'megamachine' could be recreated on a social model which could be retraced to the Egyptian cities, where, according to Mumford, the original megamachine comprised human armies assembled for military and civil engineering purposes, in which the individual was subject to the megalomaniac will of the collective. The only difference was that science and technology would allow this empire to be erected on a scale not yet dreamt of.

In contrast to the former popular accounts of the rise of Western science which portrayed the process as a gradual emergence of the pure forms of rationality from the gloom of superstition — a view still propagated in the general educational establishment — it has always been clear to thoughtful people that the situation was far more complex and paradoxical. One such paradox is the fact that the new scientific age began not with a rejection of magic, but with a revival of interest in occult theory and practical magic. In view of this it is appropriate that this study of Faustian themes, seeing Faustus abandoning his traditional studies for 'necromantic skill':

Philosophy is odious and obscure;  
Both law and physic are for petty wits;  
Divinity is basest of the three,  
Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible, and vile.  
'Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me.<sup>6</sup>

in a play which happens to have been written at the bifurcating point identified by Needham, should first investigate the concepts of magic current at the time Marlowe was writing, since these may have a bearing on what, in both senses of the word, 'ravished' Faustus.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 286f.

<sup>5</sup> Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, I i, ll. 108-12



In the Renaissance, two separate magical traditions need to be distinguished: that of traditional 'village' magic, commonly referred to as witchcraft, and an intellectual or 'higher-class' magic practised by 'Magi'.<sup>7</sup> The Magus could be described as someone who, by the study of occult (hidden) knowledge, might be able to read the secret instructions according to which the world operated, and interpret, influence, or even manipulate it in different ways. Thus, for Giordano Bruno, "*magus* signifies a wise man with the power of acting".<sup>8</sup>

Paracelsus describes the Magus in religious terms:

For there are holy men in God who serve the beatific life; they are called saints. But there are also holy men in God who serve the forces of nature, and they are called magi. God shows his miracles through His holy men, both through those of the beatific life and through those of nature, what others are incapable of doing they can do, because it has been conferred upon them as a special gift.<sup>9</sup>

It was Frances Yates who pointed out, in her seminal work *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, how much the Renaissance tradition of the Magus owed to the Florentine Marsilio Ficino, both in regard to his own ideas, and for the translations and commentaries he made. Yates describes graphically the excitement caused by the arrival of a Greek manuscript in Florence in 1460 containing the so-called *Corpus Hermeticum*, believed to be by Hermes Trismegistus, the thrice-great master.<sup>10</sup> Hermes was known by reputation, and through a work known as *Asclepius*; it was believed that he predated Plato and was perhaps a contemporary of Moses. So Ficino was ordered to put aside the task he had in hand, a translation of Plato's works, to produce a Latin version of the Hermetic texts for Cosimo di Medici. Yates' thesis, that this body of texts was a fundamental influence on the Magi / philosophers of the next century and a half, although routinely questioned and criticised, has never entirely been superseded.<sup>11</sup>

Yates argues that the newly-discovered *Corpus Hermeticum* served to rehabilitate the name of Hermes Trismegistus, which had been associated in Medieval times with magic

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<sup>7</sup> The distinction does not preclude similarities or congruences between the two traditions, but, as Thomas notes, they do not seem to have had any influence upon one another: "By this period popular magic and intellectual magic were essentially two different activities, overlapping at certain points, but to a large extent carried on in virtual independence of each other." *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 271.

<sup>8</sup> Giordano Bruno, *De Magia*, quoted in Shumaker, *Natural Magic and Modern Science*, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> I/13, 130 quoted in Jacobi (ed.), *Paracelsus, Selected Writings*, pp. 213f.

<sup>10</sup> *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 12f.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Vickers, *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, pp. 4-6 and the discussions in Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age*.

images and talismans, attracting the censure of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas;<sup>12</sup> his name was indeed attached to a wide variety of alchemical and magical writings. Now a body of texts emerged which seemed to confirm both the piety and ancient authority of their author, and which carried strong resonances of canonical biblical texts as well as providing a 'missing link' with Plato, thus making possible a synthesis of religious and classical thought. The similarities with Neo-Platonic ideas are striking, particularly Plotinian conceptions of the development of creation,<sup>13</sup> which might suggest that little was added to existing Neoplatonic doctrine by the *Corpus Hermeticum*, but this is a grave oversimplification and fails to take into account a fundamental shift in the perception of the role of human activity in the cosmos.

The cosmology of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, both of the *Asclepius* and of the tracts now added by Ficino, emphasizes the position of human beings as intermediaries between the Creator and the material universe. The creation narratives in each case differ, but many similarities remain. The prime mover is a single God, who is eternal, non-material and good. God is both male and female. Through God's will, the world is created. In *C.H.* XIII this procreative act is achieved by a combination of God's will as the masculine principle, and his wisdom as the feminine. The world emerges, according to the *Asclepius*, as the visible image of God, followed by Man, whose nature combines a spiritual and a material component. All of the versions (except that of *C.H.* V, which is concerned only with the goodness and beauty of creation) suggest that evil enters the picture with matter. *C.H.* I blames the first man, who falls in love with his image in matter, *Asclepius* sees evil in material desires, *C.H.* VI and X impute evil to the passions present in the world. *C.H.* XII and XIII suggest that evil is connected with the spirits ruling the zodiac, who have power over fate and necessity in the material world. All the versions agree that perfection of spiritual qualities, wisdom and total consciousness are the path by which humanity can be redeemed and human beings reunited with God.

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<sup>12</sup> Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> See Torchia's discussion of the ideas of hypostasis and *Tolma* in *Plotinus, Tolma and the Descent of Being*, or the survey of Plotinus' thinking in Gerson, *Plotinus*.



The relationship between God and humanity is what is strikingly new in the Hermetic account. A central feature of the *Asclepius* is its author's insistence on the unity of all creation:

sed de animalibus cunctis humanos tantum sensus ad divinae rationis intellegentiam exornat, erigit atque sustolit.

(But of all living creatures only human beings are equipped, raised and exalted by intellect to attain to the divine scheme of things.)<sup>14</sup>

The text goes on to explain:

solum enim animal homo duplex est; et eius una pars simplex quae, ut Graeci aiunt, σῦτυφδης, quam vocamus divinae similitudinis formam; est autem quadruplex, quod ὕλιχον Graeci, nos mundanum dicimus, e quo factum est corpus, quo circumtegitur illud, quod in homine divinum esse iam diximus, in quo purae mentis divinitas tecta sola cum cognitatis suis, id est mentis purae sensibus, secum ipsa conquiescat tamquam muro corporis saepta.

(So among all living beings only Man is double, and one of the parts of him is simple, what the Greeks call 'essential', and what we refer to as 'made in the image of God'. The other part is fourfold, what the Greeks call 'material' and we 'earthly'. This is what the body is made from, which serves as an envelope to that part of Man which we have termed divine, so that, in its shelter, the divinity of pure spirit, alone with what is akin to it, in other words the senses of pure spirit, should be at rest alone with itself entrenched behind the rampart of the body.)<sup>15</sup>

According to the *Asclepius*, the dual nature of humanity is the cause of human dignity.

In a famous passage, Hermes addresses Asclepius with these words:

propter haec, o Asclepi, magnum miraculum est homo, animal adorandum atque honorandum. hoc enim in naturam dei transit, quasi ipse sit deus; hoc daemonum genus nouit, utpote qui cum isdem se ortum esse cognoscat; hoc humanae naturae partem in se ipse despicit, alterius partis divinitate confisus. o hominum quanto est natura temperata felicius! diis cognata divinitate coniunctus est; partem sui, qua terrenus est, intra se despicit; cetera omnia quibus se necessarium esse caelesti dispositione cognoscit, nexu secum caritatis adstringit; suscipit caelum. sic ergo feliciore loco medietatis est positus, ut, quae infra se sunt, diligat, ipse a se superioribus diligatur. colit terram, elementis velocitate miscetur, acumine mentis maris profunda descendit. omnia ille licet: non caelum videtur altissimum; quasi e proximo enim animi sagacitate metitur. intentionem animi eius nulla aëris caligo confundit; non aquae altitudo profunda despectum eius obtundit. omnia idem est et ubique idem est.

(Apart from that, Asclepius, Man is a great miracle, a being worthy of reverence and honour. For he passes into the nature of a god as though he were God himself; he is acquainted with the race of daemons, knowing that he arises from the same source; he scorns the part of his nature that is merely human, for he sets his hope in the divinity of the other part. Oh, of what a privileged mixture the nature of Man consists! He is united with the gods by what is divine in him and related to gods; he scorns the part of himself which makes him earthly; he attaches himself with the knot of love to all those other living beings he knows are linked to him by virtue of the celestial scheme; he lifts his gaze to the heavens. For such is his position in this privileged role of intermediary that he loves the creatures below him, that he is loved by those above him. He takes care of the earth, he joins with the elements by the speed of his thought, with the sharpness of his mind he penetrates the depths of the sea. Everything is possible to him; the sky does not seem too high, for by his ingenuity he can measure it as if it were close. No fogs in the air can obscure the aim of his spirit; the earth is never so compact that it can prevent his

<sup>14</sup> Nock & Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum - Asclepius*, p. 303; my translation

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 304; my translation

work; the immense depths of the sea cannot hinder his diving sight. He is at the same time all things and in all places.)<sup>16</sup>

Of course, subsequent scholarship, by debunking the notion that the *Corpus Hermeticum* was an ancient text, any more than the Orphic hymns or the Chaldean oracles, effectively put an end to its serious academic consideration until the end of the nineteenth century, but Yates is surely right to argue that its effects on Renaissance minds was electric. Its influence on Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* is undeniable, though there is something to be learnt in the subtle change of emphasis which he added:

O great liberality of God the Father! O great and wonderful happiness of man! It is given to him to have that which he chooses and to be that which he wills. [ ... ] At man's birth the Father placed in him every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life. The seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him. If he cultivates vegetable seeds, he will become a plant. If the seeds of sensation, he will grow into a brute. If rational, he will come out a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God. And if he is not contented with the lot of any creature but takes himself up into the center of his own unity, then, made one spirit with God and settled in the solitary darkness of the Father, who is above all things, he will stand ahead of all things.<sup>17</sup>

Pico sees that Man's new position in this scheme of things would mean that he could extend his power through the whole of creation. Ficino, in subsequent works, most notably the *De Vita Libri Tres*, expanded on how this could be done by making use of the occult correspondences and connections present in the whole universe. Through intellectual and spiritual powers human beings would be able to intervene in the scheme of things and operate to make changes in areas which the teachings of the Church had traditionally reserved as the province of God and his saints.

Yates and D. P. Walker concentrate their attention, in the commentaries on Ficino and the *Asclepius*, on a particular passage describing the animation of statues. In the *Asclepius* Hermes describes:

statuas animatas sensu et spiritu plenas tantaque facientes et talia, statuas futurorum praescias eaque sorte, date, somniis multisque aliis rebus praedicentes, inbecillitates hominibus facientes easque curantes, tristitiam laetitiamque pro meritis.

(These are statues full of sense and consciousness, full of the breath of life, which can accomplish all kinds of wonders; they know the future and predict it by lots, by prophetic inspiration, dreams or other methods; they render people powerless and cure them; they bring sorrow or joy according to our desserts.)<sup>18</sup>

Just before this passage the writer explains how such idols are constructed:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 301f.; my translation

<sup>17</sup> Charles Glenn Wallis, *Pico della Mirandola: On the Dignity of Man*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965

<sup>18</sup> Nock & Festugière, *Asclepius*, p.326; my translation



species vero deorum, quas conformat humanitas, ex utraque natura conformatae sunt; ex divina, quae est purior multoque diviniore, et ex ea, quae intra homines est, id est ex materia, quae fuerint fabricatae, et non solum capitibus solis sed membris omnibus totoque corpore figurantur.

(But the images of the gods which men make are composed of both natures, of the divine which is purer and far more divine, and of that which is beneath men, i.e. the material from which they are made; besides, their figures are not confined to the head alone, but they have a body with all the limbs.)<sup>19</sup>

In a later passage the procedure is explained in more detail:

quoniam animas facere non poterant, evocantes animas daemonum vel angelorum eas indiderunt imaginibus sanctis divinisque mysteriis, per quas idola et bene faciendi et male vires habere potuissent.

(since they could not themselves make souls, after invoking the souls of daemons or angels they introduced them into their idols by sacred and divine ceremonies so that the idols had the power to do both good and evil.)<sup>20</sup>

The author rounds off the description by giving examples of statues dedicated to ancestors of Asclepius, the first healer, and Hermes.

Now it is striking that the *Asclepius* draws a clear distinction between a supreme creator God, who is pure spirit, and these images which were created subsequent to a period of 'error' when the gods were no longer believed in. They were created through the injection of 'angels' or 'demons' into material, but then possess powers such as prophecy, or good and evil influence. These influences are not simply the result of the spirits introduced into the statues but "terrenis etenim diis atque mundanis facile est irasci, utpote qui sint ab hominibus ex utraque natura facti atque compositi" (for earthly and material gods are quick to anger because they have been made by men out of the one and the other nature),<sup>21</sup> in other words they reflect *human* duality. From a psychological point of view, 'angels' and 'demons' form part of the interior cosmos of the human personality and the phenomenon we have been dealing with goes under the name 'projection'.<sup>22</sup> We will have reason to recall this theme later.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp.325f.; my translation

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.347; my translation

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 348; my translation

<sup>22</sup> Ficino himself, as part of what Walker calls a "worried and muddled defence of his own magic" ( Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, p.42), claimed not to see the statues as central, though they did fascinate him and he returned to them at the end of the enigmatic third part of *De Vita*, the *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*. There he cites Plotinus as an authority in agreeing that: "veteres sacerdotes sive Magos in statu is sacrificiisque sensibilibus divinum aliquid et mirandum suscipere solitos" ("the ancient priests or Magi used to capture in statues and material sacrifices something divine and wonderful") ( Ficino, *De Vita Coelestis Comparanda*, p. 388 — translation: Kaske), adding that this was achieved with "something vital from the Anima Mundi". Walker points out that there is a paradox here: the spirits and daemons, which Ficino associates with planetary influence, are individual and personal, while the Anima Mundi, the 'world soul', is

Both Ficino and Pico drew from the Hermetic texts justification for the idea that, in Trinkaus's words, "If man does not occupy a fixed status, then his deification, or apotheosis, is metaphysically possible."<sup>23</sup> Human beings are able to master the world of the elements and the 'lower' animals, to create civil and political order on the pattern of divine order, to use the rational mind to enquire into the essence of material existence, and contemplation to purify notions of the forms of things, separating them in the imagination from the contamination of the material, in order to unite with God. In this, Ficino goes further than the humanists who preceded him or who were his contemporaries, because

Man is conceived of not only as the *image* of God, but as a veritable divinity - a god on earth and a god in the world to come.<sup>24</sup>

Between the material of the created world, including the body, and the pure spirit of God, human beings possess souls with a tripartite division of functions. The *mens* (or intellect) is the function which relates to the eternal truths of God and expresses itself as contemplation. Intellect moves outside time or space, in the world of angels, dealing with Platonic ideas uncontaminated by material. The material world, mediated through the senses, forms the stuff for the images crystallized in the *idolum*, a term Ficino derives from Plotinus, which is the lower function of the soul. Between them, the rational soul is the function of consciousness, to which Ficino assigns the ability of logical combination and focus. This function is dependent on the movement of time and is what makes Man special because it is a free agent. It can alter its focus, moving between God and material.

So far the definition of the imagination, the creator of images reflecting reality as transmitted through the senses, differs little from Plato's conception of imagination as a reflection of a reflection of reality.<sup>25</sup> However, Ficino is also interested in the phenomenon of prophecy, in which an individual might "take pleasure and neglect civil affairs" and empty his mind, freeing it of contamination by the vestiges of human ignorance, in order to receive

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general and impersonal (Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, p.47). To reconcile the two is a logical impossibility while they are seen as exterior, but as projections of an inner world they become reasonable.

<sup>23</sup> Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, p. 512

<sup>24</sup> Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, p. 476

<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Republic*, X, 596

a kind of divine madness of the type Plato describes in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>26</sup> Ficino points out that the rational soul then becomes inoperative.

Ficino associates prophetic states either with the intellect or with the *idolum*, and thus with imagination. Imagination, then, becomes the path of direct access to the mind of God, or, at the same time, to the impulses of the material world. The implications of this for the dual power of the imagination are not fully appreciated by Ficino, who felt constantly under pressure to separate what could be positive and permissible from what might be evil or dangerous. The images which are conveyed to the imagination from either source are 'charged', in other words they carry a special emotional or ecstatic significance (termed by Jung 'numinosity'). Ficino describes how poets may be inspired, first to reveal a knowledge of their art without having learnt it,

saecundum, quod multa furentes canunt et illa quidem mirabilia, quae paulo post defervescente furore ipsimet non satis intelligunt, quasi non ipsi pronuntiaverint, sed Deus per eos ceu tubas clamaverit.

(secondly, in their madness, they say many admirable things which afterward, when their fury has lessened, they do not well understand themselves, as if they had not themselves made the utterance, but God had announced it through them as through trumpets.)<sup>27</sup>

Not only poets, according to Ficino, can be inspired while the rational soul is absent. Some philosophers think while sleeping "and make discoveries they have long sought while awake but have not found."<sup>28</sup>

Ficino opens his book *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* with the following proposition, whose relation to the philosophy of the Hermetic material will be obvious:

Si tantum haec duo sint in mundo, hinc quidem intellectus, inde vero corpus, sed absit anima, tunc neque intellectus tradetur ad corpus — immobilis enim est omnino caretque affectu, motionis principio, tanquam a corpore longissime distans — neque corpus trahetur ad intellectum, velut ad motum per se inefficax et ineptum longeque ab intellectu remotum. Verum si interponatur anima utrique conformis, facile utrinque at ad utraque fiet attractus.

(If there were only two things in the universe — on one side the Intellect, on the other the Body — but no Soul, then neither would the Intellect be attracted to the Body (for Intellect is absolutely motionless, without affect, which is the principle of motion, and very far away from the Body), nor would the Body be drawn to the Intellect (for Body is in itself powerless, unsuited for motion, and far removed from the Intellect). But if a Soul which conforms to both were to be placed between them, an attraction will easily occur to each one on either side.)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, p. 27

<sup>27</sup> Ficino, *Theologia*, Vol. II, p. 203; translation in Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 309

<sup>28</sup> Ficino, *Theologia*, quoted in Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, p.481

<sup>29</sup> Ficino, *De Vita*, p. 242, Kaske's translation



Soul, because of its position midway between intellect and body, "on the one side conforms to the divine and on the other side to the transient".<sup>30</sup>

The soul, in other words, is the principle of attraction and connection. The World Soul as a whole is dispersed throughout the universe, creating, from 'seeds' of different types, different species, from stars through to living creatures and to the simplest of materials, and the World Soul also has the power of creating material forms corresponding to each other, from the higher to the lower. Souls are attracted to forms as *divinae illices*, or divine lures.<sup>31</sup> Ficino sees the explanation for occult effects like the efficacy of medicines or the power of pagan images in these correspondences and deduces that it is possible, by using magic, to influence and manipulate the material world by their use. The *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, as Walker and Yates point out, contains detailed suggestions about how this might be done, and they go on to speculate that Ficino himself went even further in practice than he was prepared to admit in print. In *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* it becomes clear that the spirits associated with particular planets are to be attracted with things which correspond to the planets; if one wishes to use Mercury, for example, one should use

Mercurial things, which include: tin, silver, especially quicksilver, silver marcasite, agate, glass — both porphyritic and those kinds which mix yellow with green — emerald, lac, animals which are sagacious and clever and at the same time active such as monkeys and dogs, and people who are eloquent, sharp, and versatile, and who have oblong faces and hands which are not fat.<sup>32</sup>

He goes on immediately to say

But those things which pertain to any planet should be sought and performed precisely when it has dignities as I have previously specified: in its day and hour if possible, also when it is in its own house or in its exaltation or at least in its triplicity, in its term, or in a cardine of heaven, while it is direct in motion, when it is outside of the burned path, and preferably when it is east of the Sun, if it is above the Sun, if it is in apogee, and if it is aspected by the Moon.<sup>33</sup>

Much of the book is a detailed manual on such correspondences and their use:

By a similar system they [doctors] think a chain of beings descends by levels from any star of the firmament through any planet under its dominion. If, therefore, as I said, you combine at the right time all the Solar things through any level of that order, i.e. men of Solar nature or something belonging to such a man, likewise animals, plants, metals, gems, and whatever pertains to these, you will drink in unconditionally the power of the Sun and to some extent the natural power of the Solar daemons.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 243. See the elaboration of the structure of the soul as set out in the *Theologia Platonica* outlined above.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 244

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 251

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 251f.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.311

Ficino goes on to describe the figures, or images, which represent the decans of the zodiac,<sup>35</sup> shown by Yates to derive from Egyptian deities, described in detail in an ancient manuscript of magic, the *Picatrix*.<sup>36</sup> These images, engraved in stones corresponding to the planets, might prove particularly efficacious. The effect also depends on the state of mind of the adept. Quoting Arabian sources, Ficino specifies that the spirit

si per imaginationem et affectum ad opus attentissimus fuerit et ad stellas, coniungi cum ipso mundi spiritu atque cum stellarum radiis, per quos mundi spiritus agit.

(if it has been intent upon the work and upon the stars through imagination and emotion, is joined together with the very spirit of the world and with the rays of the stars through which the world spirit acts.)<sup>37</sup>

Besides imagination and emotion, the correct forms of words and music (identified by Walker as Orphic hymns)<sup>38</sup> in conjunction with appropriate colours and scents, fabrics and food, used in order to stimulate the fantasy, should be employed. Ficino uses the image of a sympathetic string vibration to describe the process, "like an echo or like a string in a lute trembling to the vibration of another which has been similarly tuned."<sup>39</sup> Finally, according to Ficino, particular words or incantations can be used although, he says, "it is better to skip incantations."<sup>40</sup> Ficino is always aware of the possibility of making contact with evil daemons intent on seduction.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Star magic is not the same as astrology, which also uses the planets and the decans, because it is operative. Hence Ficino's agreement with Pico's attack on astrology as being inconsistent with free will. (c.f. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 310-12)

<sup>36</sup> Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 49-56

<sup>37</sup> Ficino, *De Vita*, pp. 350-3 (Kaske's translation)

<sup>38</sup> Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 23f.

<sup>39</sup> Ficino, *De Vita*, p. 361

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 355

<sup>41</sup> Scholars agree that Ficino must have realised he had gone too far. What had been published as a medical book written by someone who was both a physician and a priest could be interpreted as advocating a resort to daemonic (or even conventionally demonic) powers, and by reference to the controversial parts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and only partially concealed references to Arab texts had made it clear that he was using material the Church condemned. For this reason he included an *Apologia* in which he stressed that his magic was merely natural:

Denique duo sunt magiae genera. Unum quidem eorum, qui certo quodam cultu daemones sibi conciliant, quorum opera freti fabricant saepe portenta. Hoc autem penitus explosum est, quando princeps huius mundi eiectus est foras. Alterum vero eorum qui naturales materias opportune causis subiciunt naturalibus mira quadam ratione formandas.

(Lastly, there are two kinds of magic. The first is practised by those who unite themselves to daemons by a specific religious rite, and, relying on their help, often contrive portents. This, however, was thoroughly rejected when the Prince of this World was cast out. But the other kind of magic is practised by those who seasonably subject natural materials to natural causes to be formed in a wondrous way.) (Ficino, *De Vita*, p. 399 — Kaske's translation)

The distinction set up by Ficino is followed by Walker and Yates, and Shumaker in his study *Natural Magic and Modern Science*, although he finds the boundary hard to define, is prepared to give Ficino the benefit of



As similarities produce attractions through 'heavenly lures' using correspondences on a vertical plane, so similarities between people produce love. In the dialogues in *De Amore* (the source of the idea of 'Platonic' love), Ficino illustrates the binding quality of love with a ray of light:

Descendit [radius] autem a deo primum inque angelum et animam, quasi vitreas materias transiens, et ab anima in corpus eius susceptioni paratum facile demanans, ab eo ipso iunioris hominis corpore presertim per oculos, animi phenestras lucidissimas, emicat. Advolat per aerem protinus et senioris oculos penetrans, transfigit animam, appetitum accendit, sauciam animam appetitumque accensum in medelam eius et refrigerium ducit, dum eodem rapit secum unde ipse descenderat, gradatim quidem in corpus amati primum, in animam secundo, tertio in angelum, postremo in deum, primam splendoris huius originem.

(This ray of light, originating with God, passes through the angel and the soul as through glass before proceeding from the soul to the body prepared to receive it. From this beautiful body it then shines out, particularly through the eyes as through transparent windows. Immediately it flies through the air, penetrating the eyes of the beholder, striking the soul and awaking desire in it. It then brings healing and balm to the wounded soul and inflamed desire by leading them to its origin, moving in stages to the body of the beloved, then the soul, then to the angel and finally to God, the source of the effulgence)<sup>42</sup>

Love, under the name of Eros, is described here as "sophist and magician";<sup>43</sup> it is a sophist because under its influence people easily take what is false for truth, and a magician because it functions through the attractive power of correspondences, which establish the harmony of the universe: "tota vis magice in amore consistat" (all magic power is founded on love).<sup>44</sup> In different people love inspires different things, science, art, piety or hedonism, according to the character of the person affected, and it affects people differently at different times, so that it can be called both mortal and immortal. Here it can be observed how close Ficino comes to the psychoanalytical concept of 'libido'. Ficino's ideas on love were widely propagated in the next centuries through the immensely popular *Book of the Courtier* by Castiglione. There, to correct a widespread fallacy, we note that love remains entirely erotic, though it need not be expressed sexually. Ficino's friend Bembo is made to explain that it is

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the doubt and contrast him with later Magi (like Cornelius Agrippa and Giordano Bruno), who were clearly practising spiritual or demonic magic. Yates suggests that Ficino was too timid to admit what he was doing, or even to practise it very far, but this need not be the case. Shumaker believes that the fact that he was a priest would mean that he would accept the strictures of ecclesiastical doctrine. This argument, I feel, lacks foundation. It is important to remember that at this time the only way for someone not of princely blood to study and have an academic career was by taking holy orders. The common-sense judgement must be that he was well aware of what he was doing (the use of *Picatrix*, which was notorious even then, must confirm this) and that his magic was a clear attempt to use spiritual powers to operate on and influence things happening in the material world. From the character of his writing (its humorous benignity and wisdom) we can assume that he meant these powers only to be used for good.

<sup>42</sup> Ficino, *De Amore (Über die Liebe, oder Platons Gastmahl)*, p. 240; my translation

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 242

a love that is physical in origin, arising as a response to beauty, and even physical enough to be expressed in kissing, but still transcendent, so that the beauty of the lover becomes a stair, or "shining beame of that light, which is the true image of the Angelike beautie partened with her, whereof she also partneth with the bodie a feeble shadow."<sup>45</sup>

Love, in Ficino's dialogue, by opening a transcendental vision, frees, but it also binds, so that the object of love is both loved and hated, for 'stealing one's soul'.

odis tamquam fures et homicidas, tamquam specula celesti fulgore micantia mirare  
cogeris et amare.

(you hate them as robbers and murderers; you love and worship them as mirrors  
reflecting a celestial light)<sup>46</sup>

The highest form of love is love of wisdom, a knowledge which can never be achieved, because "Quis enim presentia querat?" (who would seek for what they already possessed?)<sup>47</sup> It is perhaps significant that this key passage is put in the mouth of Diotima, a woman participant in the discussion.

After noting that love has a threefold form:

The causes love their works as parts and images of themselves. The works strive after the causes as their protectors. Things having their places in the same order are attracted to each other by mutual love, as similar elements of the same whole. Therefore God guides and governs the angels, the angels, along with God, guide and govern the Soul, the Soul, along with them the bodies, with some benevolence.<sup>48</sup>

Kristeller points out that, somewhat surprisingly, Ficino does not use his theory of love in the *Theologia Platonica*, written some years later. Kristeller sees the reason for this in Ficino's use of the word 'soul' in the latter work with almost the same denotation. Soul, in this ontological apotheosis, [is]:

maximum est in natura miraculum. Reliqua enim sub Deo unum quiddam in se singula sunt, haec omnia simul. Imagines in se possidet divinorum, a quibus ipsa dependet, inferiorum rationes et exemplaria, quae quodammodo et ipsa producit. Et cum media omnium sit, vires possidet omnium. [Quod] si ita est, transit in omnia. Et quia ipsa vera est universorum connexio, dum in alia migrat, non deserit alia, sed migrat in singula, ac semper cuncta conservat, ut merito dici possit centrum naturae, universorum medium, mundi series, vultus omnium nodusque et copula mundi.

(the greatest of all miracles in nature. All other things beneath God are always one single being, but the Soul is all things together. It possesses the images of the divine things on which it depends itself and the concepts and originals of the lower things which in a certain sense it produces itself. And since it is the centre of all things, it has the forces of

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 246; my translation

<sup>45</sup> Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, p. 318f. For the relationship between Castiglione, Bembo and Ficino, see Raffini, *Marsilio Ficino, Pietro Bembo, Baldassare Castiglione*.

<sup>46</sup> Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 250; my translation

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 252; my translation

<sup>48</sup> Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 111f:



all. Hence, it passes into all things. And since it is the true connection of all things, it goes to the one without leaving the others. It goes into an individual thing and always deals with all. Therefore it may be rightly called the centre of nature, the middle term of all things, the series of the world, the face of all, the bond and the juncture of the universe.)<sup>49</sup>

Most commentators will concur with Shumaker in saying that it was Marsilio Ficino "by whom, more than by any other single person, the astonishing vogue of Renaissance magic was initiated..."<sup>50</sup> but, as has been made clear, Ficino's achievement consisted less in the elaboration of a new philosophy than in gathering the strands of Neoplatonic, Hermetic and occult traditions, and reformulating them in a succinct and stimulating way. Not only was magical operation possible, it was intellectually justified, and provided with a pedigree that seemed to promise a grand synthesis between religious ideas, albeit of a somewhat heterodox nature, and the re-emergent glories of pagan intellectual achievement, of which the *Corpus Hermeticum* was reckoned a part, as well as allowing scope for a more important role for vernacular poetry and the female muse, on the model of Dante's Beatrice.<sup>51</sup> What he had done at the same time was to release powers which had been circumscribed and colonised by the preaching and practice of the Church, so that, with their emancipation, ambivalent spiritual forces became available to the operator which could express themselves in positive or negative aspects of the operation or its object. The fact that Ficino's personality encouraged the lighter side should not blind us to its essentially dual nature. Ficino had also, it seems to me, reactivated a complex of ideas termed 'Gnosticism', from which the Hermetic texts had themselves sprung, so that the 'Hermetic' tradition needs to be placed within the larger Gnostic tradition for its full significance to be appreciated.

Ficino's misdating of the Hermetic texts was not revealed until 1614, and even then there were those (like Fludd) who, through a desire to have mysteries that were ancient and 'oriental', rejected or ignored the new findings. Ironically, though, for our purposes the truth of the dating of these texts is far more interesting, for it associates them clearly with the Gnosticism which originated in the Middle East at roughly the same time as Christianity.

Gnosticism long shared the fate of the conquered: its tenets were known only through the attacks of its victorious Christian opponents, the heresiologists of the 2nd - 4th centuries,

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<sup>49</sup> Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, Vol. I, pp. 141f.; translation in Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p. 120

<sup>50</sup> Shumaker, *Natural Magic and Modern Science*, p. 4

and its texts either went unrecognised (in the case of the Hermetic corpus) or were believed irretrievably lost. An upsurge of interest in the Gnostic doctrines which took place in the first half of the 20th century (when Hans Jonas saw parallels between it and Heideggerian existentialism, and C. G. Jung saw it as prefiguring depth psychology), was followed by the discovery of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts in Egypt in 1945,<sup>52</sup> from which clear links could be established both to the heresiologists' reports and to the existing Hermetic texts.

In a fascinating and wide-ranging survey, Giovanni Filoramo has now taken the new discoveries fully into account, enabling certain generalisations about Gnostic doctrines, which are notoriously heterogeneous, to be made.

Gnosticism, like Neoplatonism, assumes an originary unity in an unknown and unknowable God who is part of the Pleroma, an infinite potentiality of being in which all opposites cancel each other out. From this unity, by a process of hypostasis, the originary one is reflected in a thought, a female element called Ennoia, and the product of their union is Nous, divine knowledge, and Aletheia, truth. From them in turn spring couples such as Logos and Zoe (Word and Life). These manifestations of divine originary unity are known as Aeons. Together they remain part of the primal Anthropos, the perfect Man (who is thus also God).<sup>53</sup> The crisis comes at the boundary of the Pleroma when the last of the Aeons, Sophia, offends against the androgynous principle in procreating alone.<sup>54</sup> The crisis is thus connected with sexuality, and the result, the visible cosmos, is imperfect, in some accounts even an 'aborted foetus'. The degree of its imperfection varies according to the different branches of Gnosticism from the 'optimistic', which represents the created world of matter as a beautiful reflection of originary perfection — and Ficino clearly inclined in this direction — to the 'pessimistic', which sees the world as the realm of devils under the command of a blind and arrogant demiurge who is under the illusion that there is no higher power than himself. Human beings, while inevitably part of this botched world, have a 'divine spark' within them which comes from the original imprint, like a genetic code, of the spiritual principle of the Pleromatic world. Through a process of obtaining knowledge (Gnosis), a

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<sup>51</sup> See Nelson, *The Renaissance Theory of Love, & The Courtier*

<sup>52</sup> The story of their discovery, immediate involvement in a blood-feud, miraculous escape from destruction, subjection to political and scholarly squabbles before their final publication is worthy of Hollywood.

<sup>53</sup> Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, pp. 56-67

process which needs to be accompanied by some kind of corresponding soteriological movement from above, humanity can ascend to become reunited with the true Anthropos. The conditions of this redemption vary according to the branches of Gnosticism. The radical Sethians, the least influenced by Christianity, foresee salvation only for a preordained elect of Gnostics. The Valentinians, on the other hand, come closer to the Christian message, and see Jesus as the higher principle sent to redeem humanity from the prison or trap of the material world.<sup>55</sup>

Three specimens of Gnostic thought can serve as illustrations, and will provide an intriguing background for the development of the Faustian themes I intend to discuss.

The first is from the Nag Hammadi find, the 'Hypostasis of the Archons', dated by Roger Ballard tentatively to the third century AD.<sup>56</sup> The blind demiurge Yaldabaoth blasphemes against the Entirety by claiming to be the only God. His blind thoughts are expelled into chaos and the abyss, and create visible realms according to the pattern of the invisible. The Incorruptible looks down into the region of the waters, and the dark rulers (Archons) see the reflected image and fall in love with it. They determine to make a male counterpart out of matter, but cannot make him rise. Only the Spirit, descending from above, can do that. The Archons place this man, Adam, in the garden, forbidding him to eat from the tree of knowledge. Next they put Adam into a sleep of ignorance and extract Eve from his side. They do not see that she is endowed with Spirit, and when they try to rape her she separates into a reflection, which they rape, and a Spiritual Principle which returns in the form of a snake and instructs Eve and Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge and so free themselves from the power of the Archons. Adam and Eve are subsequently expelled from the garden, as in the Biblical story, and after the unfortunate Cain and Abel, their children are Seth and Norea, the ancestors of the generations of humanity to be saved. When the Archons try to rape Norea in her turn, she calls for assistance and is instructed by Eleleth, the great Angel from the presence of the Holy Spirit. The angel recounts the story told earlier so that Norea learns of her true origins and receives a prophesy of salvation to come through the True Man.

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<sup>54</sup> Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, pp. 67-72. This can be compared with the Neoplatonic idea of 'tolma' (rebellious audacity) found in Plotinus, and discussed in Torchia, *Plotinus, Tolma, and the Descent of Being*.

<sup>55</sup> Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, pp. 110-24.



The second example is the 'Poimandres', the first tract of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.<sup>57</sup> In an introductory passage Poimandres, a vast being who also describes itself as Nous, appears to the narrator, Hermes, who has fallen into a trance-like sleep, with the words "I know what you want and I am always with you."<sup>58</sup> Hermes asks to know about the beings in the universe, and God. Immediately a vision of light opens out with darkness spiralling down like a snake, changing into a 'kind of dampness' with a 'kind of sound', an inarticulated call. A Word blows hither and thither over this mixture of water and earth. The guide explains that he, Nous, is the light, and the Word is the Son of God. Looking into his Nous more closely, Hermes sees it as composed of an infinity of powers, the archetypal preexistent and endless form. The elements of nature, it explains, come from the Will of God, ordered and given souls by the Word. Male / female Nous, Light and Life, speaks a second demiurgical Nous of fire and breath, who creates seven Governors of destiny. The Word of God now withdraws from the elements, leaving them as pure material, after having first set them in motion, which produces the creatures without reason that inhabit the earth. The Nous next creates a human in its own image, and falls in love with the human, to whom it gives the creation. The human is given power to join in creation and leans across the armature of the spheres. Seeing there the image of itself, the beauty of divine form coupled with the energy of the Governors, reflected in nature, humanity falls in love with the image in nature, and nature reciprocates the love.<sup>59</sup> Thus humanity, really part of the world beyond the spheres, comes to be imprisoned within their orbit: from the energy of the seven Governors seven upright androgynous humans are created from feminine earth, generative water, maturing fire and vital air. Life, from above, becomes soul, and Light becomes intellect. At this point all creatures are divided into male and female, and those with intellect can see that love is the cause of death, while those who lose sight of this in pure body will remain imprisoned in the suffering of the senses. Humans who aspire to be good and pure will be assisted by the presence of Nous and abandon the body to death, while the others who are abandoned by Nous will be visited by a 'demon of vengeance' who will prompt them to the tortures of their

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<sup>56</sup> *The Nag Hammadi in English*, p. 152

<sup>57</sup> Nock & Fustugière, *Corpus Hermeticum*, pp. 7-19

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

appetites. Those who rise beyond the world, leaving the material realm behind, pass through seven spheres where they abandon seven vices one by one (bearing a strange resemblance to the Seven Deadly Sins)<sup>60</sup> and are finally reunited with God.

Poimandres, having revealed the cosmogony, reminds Hermes of his commission to awaken sleeping humanity and make them aware of their situation. Hermes is left thankful and joyful at having received this vision from a Self that is not himself, and after purification and sacrifice of a pure soul and heart, offers up a prayer for strength to avoid the dangers of falling and to illumine the darkness of ignorance.

The third example is different in that no original text is extant, so we have to make do with the reports of the heresiologists, but because they are particularly vitriolic they need to be treated with caution. Simon Magus receives only a brief mention in the Acts of the Apostles (viii, 9-24), where Philip finds Samaria under the influence of "a certain Simon", who has been practising magic and is regarded by the people as a great power of God. When Peter and John join Philip they do even greater miracles and pass on the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. Simon is impressed, and offers payment in exchange for the same power. He is rebuked and asks the apostles to pray for him. This is a slender basis for the reputation of the archetypal black magician which appears as a warning exemplar in Renaissance texts. The reason he became known as the 'first minister' of the all-evil Daemon<sup>61</sup> was the need seen by the early Church to combat a particularly obdurate heretical sect who bore Simon's name, although there is no way now of telling what connection there really was between them and a possible historical Simon.

G.R.S. Mead, a contemporary of Yeats, collates information drawn from Justinus, Irenaeus, and the *Philosophumena*, a text attributed to Hippolytus, to recount that Simon, a Samaritan magician, later went to Rome, where he was honoured with a statue by the Emperor Claudius. Simon asserted that human beings are the dwelling of the Boundless Power, which generated in pairs Mind and Thought, Voice and Name, and Reason and

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<sup>59</sup> Note the subtle difference between this extraordinary image and the Narcissus story. Failure to recognize this, and a tendency to treat myth too literally, mar Robert Segal's account of the 'Poimandres' in the light of the work of Eliade and Jung: *The Poimandres as Myth*.

<sup>60</sup> The seven are the power of growth (gluttony), malice (envy), illusion of desire (lechery), ostentation of command (pride), audacious temerity (wrath), illicit appetite for riches (covetousness), and the lie which guards the cages (sloth), Nock & Fustugière, *Corpus Hermeticum*, pp.15f.

<sup>61</sup> Theodoretus, quoted in Mead, *Simon Magus*, p.28. See also Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, p. 147.

Reflection. With the Boundless Power, which stood, stands, and will stand, they form seven, which are potentialities needing to be made real. Thus the divine is potentially present in all humanity. Mind and Thought are heaven and earth, Voice and Name the sun and moon, Reason and Reflection air and water. From the image of the Seventh power human beings are created, and if they perfect the actuality of this image, they achieve immortality beyond the material. Humans are fashioned in the Garden, which is the womb.<sup>62</sup>

The originally androgynous Power is separated into a principle of generation (male) and nourishing (female). Female Thought is trapped in the world created by the demiurge and ruled by the lower powers. Forced to migrate from body to body as the 'lost sheep' undergoing degradation after degradation, she was incarnated as Helen of Troy, and also as Helen, a prostitute who Simon found in a brothel in Tyre and took around as his companion. Simon was also associated with Zeus and the sun, Helen with Selene (Luna), the moon. Thus in Simon, 'the standing one', and Helen, the sacred whore, humanity could be redeemed. 'Gnosis' would mean in this case making straight the true human within.<sup>63</sup>

The heresiological texts claimed that Simon asserted that through their redemption his followers had freedom to act as they chose, against the laws instigated by the demiurge and his powers, and that they therefore practised communal sex.

Later texts on Simon convert him into a legendary figure. The so-called 'Clementine' texts portray Simon as a magician who can tunnel through mountains, fly, make gold, animate statues, melt iron and make sickles reap ten times as much as usual.<sup>64</sup> This proto-engineer is also involved in disputes with the apostle Peter, and at one point, pursued by Peter's friends, turns the protagonist Clement's father, called in one version Faustinianus and another Faustus, into the exact appearance of himself.<sup>65</sup> These stories, which were well known in the Renaissance, also recount Simon's death, at Rome. Having survived a spectacular illusory

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<sup>62</sup> The books of the Bible become allegories of the senses; after Genesis, which is sight, Exodus is birth, associated with taste; Leviticus, dealing with sacrifices, is smell, Numbers hearing and speech, Deuteronomy touch, by which all the rest are synthesized. (See Mead, *Simon Magus*, pp.17f.)

<sup>63</sup> Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, pp. 150f.

<sup>64</sup> Mead, *Simon Magus*, pp. 32f.

<sup>65</sup> Brown, *Marlowe, Faustus, and Simon Magus*, pp. 89ff. Brown points out that the name Faustus is most clearly associated with this story by the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, rather than their companion *Recognitions*.



decapitation, he dies while attempting to fly, brought down by a particularly well-aimed prayer uttered by Peter.<sup>66</sup>

Mead's account goes on to associate the Simonian Gnosis with Hindu texts, and with the theosophy current at the time he was writing, at the end of the 19th century. Filoramo connects Gnosticism with a long 'underground tradition', which we will meet again. Both authors see these Gnostic myths as living entities, not the product of dry, academic archeology. They form a pattern of narration through which a truth which is felt to lie beyond logical expression can be experienced and communicated in the form of myth or allegory allowed to resonate beyond itself.<sup>67</sup> In this case it is the process by which humanity understands Anthropos as a predicate of the divine, a manifestation of God as a simultaneous and complementary movement to the promptings of a mysterious call or numinous intuition, a 'troubling vision' of the presence of a transcendent 'divine' element or essence beyond the scope of the apparently comprehensible material world. It is a bringing to consciousness of a personal movement aimed at reuniting the Gnostic with her or his own self, being therefore much more than the Neoplatonic abstract striving for 'higher things', and different in nature from the Christian concept of redemption as redemption from sin.

The Gnostic Saviour does not come to reconcile humankind with God, but to reunite the Gnostic with himself. He does not come to pardon a sin that the Gnostic cannot have committed, but to rectify a situation of ignorance and deficiency and to re-establish the original plenitude.<sup>68</sup>

If, following Nygren,<sup>69</sup> it is spiritual love (agape) which underlies Christian redemption, Gnostic redemption is powered by an erotic force countering the magnetism of the image implanted in the material world, as described in the 'Poimandres', and thus, we must infer, paradoxically in increased danger of being seduced by that very image, of falling rather than standing.

Filoramo locates Gnosticism in a first-century cultural context which is characterized by a multicultural exchange on the south-eastern periphery of the Roman Empire, where

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<sup>66</sup> This story apparently connects with the death of a gymnast playing the part of Icarus in a play put on for Nero. See Mead, *Simon Magus*, p. 37

<sup>67</sup> Filoramo discusses Plutarch in this context, showing how he accepted Plato's dictum that myth intervenes and occurs at the junction between being and becoming, and employs an exegesis which "is not an end in itself, but exercises its *logos* as if letting itself be guided by a principle of free symbolic associations, which aim at illuminating, in the mass of traditional material, vast, harmonious principles on which the universe is supposed to exist." Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, p. 50.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106

Hellenistic, Jewish, Iranian and Egyptian ideas found an intellectually sophisticated meeting-place in Roman-controlled Alexandria. There, in a period of political and economic change and uncertainty,<sup>70</sup> Gnosticism, like Christianity, developed out of an erasure of the strict boundary between human and divine, where religious ecstasy or prophecy gives way to the concept of identity between human potential and a need in God.<sup>71</sup>

In the context of such a world picture, it is naturally possible to contemplate manipulating the material world through the agency of a higher power. That Jesus and the apostles performed miracles, and that these miracles were scarcely different in kind from the achievements imputed to magic might have been thought to render the Christian Church more sympathetic to magical practice, but of course once the Church laid claim to spiritual exclusivity it became involved in a struggle to assert and maintain authority through a monopolistic control over the God-image. Whatever lay outside that carefully circumscribed ecclesiastical 'magic circle' was dangerous and forbidden, and the Church took brutal and effective action against any apparent upsurge of Gnostic tendencies, for instance in the Albigenian Crusade or the suppression of the Knights Templar.

Fascination, mystery, and an odour of concealment hang around the works of the Renaissance intellectuals after Ficino in the 'occult' tradition, all of whom are deeply concerned with the investigation of material reality with the aim of 'reading' it and applying the knowledge gained to manipulating the events and beings which are subject to its 'laws', now seen from a Gnostic perspective as either an impure reflection of God-given laws or the unjust impositions of the demiurge. Whether this conception was consciously present in the mind of Magi is impossible to tell. To publish, or be known to hold, opinions explicitly contrary to the Church's teachings, would be foolish, particularly in a climate of increasing hysteria about heresy and witchcraft. But since we know that Ficino had access to *Picatrix*, which he does not acknowledge, and as texts tended to circulate in a manuscript 'samizdat' form among like-minded scholars, who all shared Latin as a working language, we are not

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<sup>69</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp. 289-316

<sup>70</sup> Green, *The Economic and Social Origins of Gnosticism*, pp. 261ff.

<sup>71</sup> The similarities between this situation and the background of the postcolonial writers to be considered later are striking.

unjustified in assuming that magical knowledge and its Hermetic and Gnostic justification were widely known throughout the Renaissance.<sup>72</sup>

While much attention has been paid recently to the extent to which operative magic provides a basis for the origins of Western science,<sup>73</sup> its metonymic dimensions have been neglected, partly because little attempt has been made to link magic with creative writing and literature beyond its illustrative value as a source of imagery. For years a laughing-stock illustrating the primitive, naïve mindset of our ancestors, the transmutation of substances by alchemy provides a key to the appreciation of the Renaissance attitude to the manipulation of reality and the power of the imagination.

Alchemy was among the occult branches of knowledge which experienced an upsurge of interest after Ficino, and to which the Magus often turned his attention. These included astrology, chiromancy (palmistry), physiognomy (reading of character from features), the art of memory, numerology and word-magic; each of these studies enjoyed a more or less close relationship with the physical world it was attempting to read or use in its operations, and because systematic and classificatory efforts were made to understand the material, an increase in objective knowledge was the predictable result.<sup>74</sup> To see them only as precursors of the science we know, however, would be to misunderstand them by completely removing their spiritual dimension.

Alchemy, like Hermeticism or Gnosticism, whose roots intertwine with it, was not a discovery of the Renaissance; Hermes Trismegistus' name was attached to many alchemical texts. Alchemy was reintroduced to the West by Arab scholars, but it also flourished in India and China.<sup>75</sup> In Europe it seems to have been practised throughout the Middle Ages, but its remarkable revival in the Renaissance ran parallel with the rediscovery of the Gnostic tradition. Relying on the Arab sources, opinions always differed as to whether true aurifaction was possible, and authorities like Albertus Magnus only claimed that the

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<sup>72</sup> The case of *Picatrix* and Ficino is exemplary; Dee's library catalogue, based on his own list of the books he admitted to possessing, contained an extensive occult section. Even an orthodox Protestant like Scot obviously had access to occult grimoires in preparing Book XIV of the *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, and we know of Newton's 'samizdat' exchanges with fellow alchemists.

<sup>73</sup> e.g. by Shumaker, Vickers, etc.

<sup>74</sup> For this reason the relation of these magic practices to the beginnings of modern sciences was the main interest after the bifurcatory leap mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in connection with the concept of 'law', which will be examined in more detail later.



transmutation of metals could 'perhaps' be carried out.<sup>76</sup> Part of the problem was that the descriptions of observable chemical phenomena were expressed in ways indistinguishable from theological or philosophical visions, so that it was never clear which was to be considered the reality and which the metaphor.<sup>77</sup> C.G. Jung, in following the analogy of symbols produced in dreams and active imagination in the course of analysis, pioneered a study of the bewildering range of symbolism carefully preserved in alchemical texts from the first century to the eighteenth and posed the question:

In view of the fact that such a miracle never did occur in the retort, despite repeated assertions that someone had actually succeeded in making gold, and that neither a panacea nor an elixir has demonstrably prolonged a human life beyond its due, and that no homunculus has ever flown out of the furnace — in view of this totally negative result we must ask on what the enthusiasm and infatuation of the adepts could possibly have been based.<sup>78</sup>

Jung stresses that the philosophical alchemical texts are anxious to distinguish 'aurum nostrum' from 'aurum vulgi'.<sup>79</sup>

Mircea Eliade, in his study *Forgerons et Alchimistes*, includes an extensive and helpful bibliography of Chinese, Indian and Graeco-Western alchemy<sup>80</sup> in his appendices, as well as an appreciation of the Jungian approach to alchemy, which he largely follows. He suggests, apart from the symbolic and metonymic progress of the adept through the stages of the *opus* towards an inner resurrection and conquest of death and time (symbolised by the creation of the stone / gold), that in addition alchemy was making the point that the process was externalised in material, i.e. that an inner creative or soteriological process caused manipulative changes in apparent 'reality'.<sup>81</sup>

At the root of alchemy is a parallel or identity between upper and lower, or perhaps inner and outer. This is the central theme of the *Tabula Smaragdina* or Emerald Tablet of Hermes.<sup>82</sup> Its main points are: what is below is like what is above; everything is produced by the one; its father is the sun and its mother the moon, the wind carries it in its belly; its power

<sup>75</sup> Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol 5 (2), p. 15. See also the collection of Indian and Chinese alchemical texts on Adam McLean's Alchemy web site ([www.levity.com/alchemy](http://www.levity.com/alchemy))

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 30f.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 72f.

<sup>78</sup> Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol 14, p. 319

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 458

<sup>80</sup> Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, pp.188-99.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., in particular chapters 13 & 14 and Appendix O (German edition), Appendix Note N (English edition)

is perfect; the subtle must be separated from the gross, using fire; it rises, and then descends, combining the power of the upper and lower; this was how the world was created.

There are many varying descriptions of the alchemical '*opus*', but Jung delineated a number of typical processes and some of the most common names and images attached to them.<sup>83</sup> As these will open some useful lines of enquiry in the texts considered later, a brief survey of the processes, necessarily drastically simplified, is essential. The adept needs to be suitably prepared, and the work be conducted in a special vessel, the *vas hermetica*.<sup>84</sup> The adept begins with a *prima materia*. This may be a base metal, earth, an expression of worthlessness like 'dross', or an abstraction such as chaos or elemental disharmony. The first stage in the process is usually the *nigredo*, which involves decay and decomposition or suffering, but from which a seed grows, leading to a gradual clarification or whitening, the *albedo*. This is a feminine condition of silver, represented by the moon.

Following this the work becomes less laborious, but more confusing. The elements have now been reunited, but a series of poisonous or predatory animals are associated with progress to a new phase, the reddening or *rubedo*. From this gold is produced. Alternatively, the gold, or sun, must be joined with the silver, the moon, in an incestuous marriage, during which the male adept may need the help of a female assistant or *soror mystica*. The *coniunctio* produces a by-product of scum (*terra damnata*) which must be abandoned, and finally, accompanied by the brilliant colours of the *cauda pavonis* (peacock's tail), the goal of the *opus*: the *lapis*, or philosopher's stone, sometimes the homunculus, the Anthropos, or Christ. The whole process is accompanied by the hermaphrodite spirit Mercurius. He / she often begins in the *prima materia*, emerging as an ambiguous trickster spirit and catalyst, capable of guiding to success or tempting to disaster before, if all goes well, transforming himself into the *lapis* or redeemer. Mercurius / mercury is the spiritual principle within the material; in metals the material principle is sulphur, mixed

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<sup>82</sup> For a useful compilation of versions, see Alchemy web site (<http://www.levity.com/alchemy>) which includes translations and commentaries by scholars ranging from Albertus Magnus, Trithemius and Meier to Newton and Needham.

<sup>83</sup> Jung, *Collected Works*, Vols. 12-14, passim, CW 18, pp. 751ff.

<sup>84</sup> According to Eliade (*The Forge and the Crucible*, p.158), this can be a skull, as the 'container of thoughts)

in varying degrees with the mercury. The parallels with the Gnostic world picture are evident.

Common gold could be tested by using a touchstone, or Lydian stone, but the true assaying process involved fire and very high temperatures. In alchemy, the Lydian stone became a synonym of the *lapis* itself and its incorruptibility proved by the torment of fire.<sup>85</sup>

Although a large number of alchemical works circulated only among initiates, accentuating the popular impression of alchemists as involved in 'sorcery', the names of some alchemical authors were more widely known. These included Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, and perhaps George Ripley, whose *Scroll* and *Twelve Gates* are an excellent introduction to the stages and complexities of the *opus*. An older text, entitled *Interrogationes regis Calid et responiones Morieni, de quibus artificium magisterii Hermetis constare comprobatur*,<sup>86</sup> has special interest, being the instruction of a layman, King Kalid, by the hermit Morienus Romanus (who appears as Dr Marianus in the apotheosis at the end of Goethe's *Faust II*).<sup>87</sup> Most of the dialogue can be seen as a commentary on the Emerald Tablet, but there are one or two striking additions. Morienus notes:

Simili igitur modo hoc magisterium est unum per se existens, nec alio indiget. Quoniam apud Philosophos hoc magisterium est tectum et absconsum, & ubicumque fuerit, mille nominibus nominatur. Est etiam sigillatum, neque nisi sapientibus apertum: quoniam sapientes hoc magisterium multum quaerunt, & quaesitum inveniunt, & inventum simul ament & ornant: stulti vero illud derident, & apud illos pro minimo, aut quod verius, pro nihilo reputatur. Ignorant enim quid hoc sit.

(Similarly, this work [the magisterium] exists in itself alone and does not need anything else. Since, according to the philosophers, this doctrine is secret and hidden, and yet is everywhere, it is known by a thousand names. It is also sealed up and open to none but the wise. As the wise seek this doctrine diligently and find what they seek, they love and adorn what they have found. But fools laugh at this doctrine, and think it is worth little, or rather nothing at all. For they do not know what it is.)<sup>88</sup>

Later Morienus explains that "Haec enim res a te extrahitur" (You see, this thing [the stone] is extracted from your own self),<sup>89</sup> that it "in viis projicitur, & in sterquiliniis suis calcatur"

<sup>85</sup> Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 72

<sup>86</sup> The text purports to be a 12th century translation by Robert of Chester of an older Arabic work; its Arabic origins appear certain. See Ruska, *Arabische Alchemisten*, and Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, Vol. II, pp. 214-17 (where the opening of the work is compared to the Clementine *Recognitions*)

<sup>87</sup> See Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9ii, pp. 166ff. and Wertenschlag-Birkhäuser, *Das Gespräch zwischen Calid und Morienus*

<sup>88</sup> Wertenschlag-Birkhäuser, *Das Gespräch zwischen Calid und Morienus*, pp. 27ff.; my translation

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 45; my translation; Eliade notes (*The Forge and the Crucible*, p. 164) that an English book of 1652 gave 170 different names for the stone.



(is thrown into the street and trodden into the shit)<sup>90</sup> It is created by intercourse, pregnancy, birth and nourishment, and composed of the four elements, being part of an organic process. The author goes through the alchemical stages of *nigredo* and *albedo*, pointing out that gold must be added as 'leaven' (*fermentum*) for the elements to come together over a constant heat, which must not become excessive. The work closes with Morienus' promise to show the king things "in quibus tota huius magisterii constat efficacia" (on which the success of this work depends),<sup>91</sup> including red, yellow and white fumes, the green lion, blood and 'eudica'.

The sixteenth-century Magus Theophrastus Bombastus of Hohenheim, known as Paracelsus, asserted that all physicians, as well as being grounded in natural philosophy, astronomy and the 'virtues' of people and things, should be alchemists.<sup>92</sup> The reason behind this was simple. The human being was a microcosm, reflecting the apparently outer world exactly through a system of 'correspondences': "What is the difference between the sun, moon, Mercury, Saturn, and Jupiter in heaven and the same planets in man? There is only one of form."<sup>93</sup> We can catch an echo of the Gnostic annunciation and Pico della Mirandola's *Oration* in Paracelsus: "God made his heaven in man beautiful and great, noble and good, for God is in His Heaven, i.e. in man. For He Himself says that He is in us, and that we are His temple."<sup>94</sup> Paracelsus thus sees himself justified in using the operative forms of magic, of which alchemy forms part:

Magic has power to experience and fathom things which are inaccessible to human reason. For magic is a great secret wisdom, just as reason is a great public folly. Therefore it would be desirable and good for the doctors of theology to know something about it and to understand what it actually is, and cease unjustly and unfoundedly to call it witchcraft.<sup>95</sup>

The assumption of the intimate connection between these and other ideas from Gnosticism and Neoplatonism (sometimes filtered through mystic visionaries like Hildegard of Bingen) is confirmed by Walter Pagel,<sup>96</sup> but Goldammer points out that Paracelsus also represents a point of bifurcation in three main areas: his anthropological conclusion that human beings, as

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 43; my translation

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 63; my translation

<sup>92</sup> Pagel, *Paracelsus*, p. 25

<sup>93</sup> Jacobi: *Paracelsus Selected Writings*, p. 135

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 119

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 211. Goldammer questions whether the work this is taken from, *De Occulta Philosophia*, is really by Paracelsus.

microcosms, contain the God within led to a waning interest in spirits; his practical concerns led him as a doctor to new efforts to combat disease and uphold human rights; his practical alchemy, concentrating on chemical remedies and reviving the folkloric doctrine of 'signatures' — like curing like — is generally regarded as the source not only of homeopathy, but of pharmacology too.<sup>97</sup> In this Paracelsus, who suggested that magic should be used to combat harmful or demonic influences, builds a fascinating bridge to the world of the 'wise woman' of village witchcraft tradition.<sup>98</sup>

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola is credited by Yates with marrying Hermeticism and Hebrew-Christian Cabala.<sup>99</sup> The magical part of Cabala depended on the secret powers of the sacred names of God. Particularly by combining the numerical value of the letters, with certain geometrical formations, it was believed that daemons and angels could be called or bound, as tales reported that Solomon could do. Pico himself did not wish to go so far, but later practitioners deduced that, as the power of Jesus' name was the greatest on earth, his was the most efficacious to use, and indeed that it was by such magical means that Christ had performed miracles.

Johannes Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* of 1497 bears witness to impatience with magical philosophy which brings no results. One of the characters in his dialogue exclaims:

Nam cum totam aetatem in tam sacrilego negotio consumpseris, inde nihil quod sit, sed quod forte videatur, aegre tandem exorseris, cum expectatione summi periculi vitae atque necis.

(For having spent one's whole life on this godless business [magic], one finally toils and sweats to produce something which does not really exist, but only appears to do so, and that at the greatest danger to life and limb.)<sup>100</sup>

Here Reuchlin is referring to the kind of magic which employed incantations to enforce spirits to obedience. He refers specifically to *Picatrix*, and through references to Solomon:

Ait enim ille antiquitatum octavo, Salomonem contra daemones artem ad utilitatem hominum et eorum curas invenisse, incantamenta contra aegritudines instituisse, modum etiam coniurationum.

(He [Josephus] says indeed in his eighth book of 'Antiquities' that for the good of mankind Solomon had invented an art to be used against daemons, spells against sickness, and a method of conjuration.)<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Pagel, *Paracelsus and the Neoplatonic and Gnostic Tradition*

<sup>97</sup> Goldammer, *Paracelsus in neuen Horizonten*, pp. 305ff

<sup>98</sup> Goldammer, *Der Göttliche Magier und die Magierin Natur*, p. 106

<sup>99</sup> Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 84ff., 97-106

<sup>100</sup> Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico*, p. 136 (my translation)

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 122 (my translation)

indicates that he was familiar with the manuscript of incantations known as the *Clavicula Salomonis*.<sup>102</sup> With such materials, his character Sidonius maintains:

Nihil igitur horum et Roberthus et Bacon et Abanus et Picatrix et concilium magistrorum, vel maxime ob linguarum ignorantiam ad amissim, ut oportet, tenere atque docere,...

(Robert, Bacon, Abanus, Picatrix and the whole council of Masters could appreciate and teach none of this properly, as it should be done, chiefly because they did not know the languages.)<sup>103</sup>

In addition such magicians were in danger of coming to a sticky end:

Ita ipsa Roberthum Anglicum apud Helvetios misere mortuum, et alterum quemdam, cuius nomen taceo, miserius captum famaue mulctatum novi.

(I myself know that Robert the Englishman met a gruesome death at the hands of the Swiss, and another acquaintance, whose name I shall not mention, was captured under even more wretched conditions and lost his good reputation.)<sup>104</sup>

But Reuchlin is not implying a rejection of magic;<sup>105</sup> on the contrary, the high art of 'soliloquia' into which his persona, Capnion, agrees to initiate his companions, although it seeks to avoid the dangers outlined above, and uses instead cabalistic magic based on the sacred Jewish unpronounceable Tetragrammaton (IHUH), or its even higher form IHSUS, the pronounceable miracle-working name of Jesus, still requires ceremonies of purification, an appropriate place, the right time of day, and the singing of propitiatory hymns in Ionic metre dedicated to the Creator. In other words it requires magical sympathy between human beings and the created universe. Reuchlin refers to the *Corpus Hermeticum* in saying:

Sic igitur exuperantissimus omnium deus, qui ad sui exemplar, teste Mercurio ter maximo, duas finxit imagines: mundum et hominem, quo luderet in orbe terrarum, ut est in Parabolis, et delitiis frueretur in filius hominum, in mundo ludit mirificis operationibus non sydereis vel elementari tantum virtute, verum etiam aliquando proprietate occulta.

(This is how Almighty God, who, as Hermes Trismegistus testifies, created two images of himself, the world and mankind, to have delight in the sphere of the world, as it says in the Proverbs, and whose delights were with the sons of men, takes delight in miracles, not only through the power of the stars or elements, but sometimes also through other occult properties.)<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *The Key of Solomon the King*, which later also provided Scot with his material on conjuration in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*.

<sup>103</sup> Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico*, p. 124 (my translation)

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 136 (my translation)

<sup>105</sup> This point is stressed by Charles Zika in his fascinating article, 'Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century', to which I am indebted. Zika notes, incidentally, that Reuchlin met both Pico and Ficino during travels in Italy.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 158 (my translation). The reference to Proverbs (supposedly written by Solomon) is especially interesting, as it refers to Wisdom (Sophia) supposedly pre-existent to the creation; Gnostics saw this text as supporting their beliefs.



Nature, the material world, is seen as an image of something beyond itself, and linked with human beings by the attraction of God's love to God himself, so that God's purpose is the transformation of humanity "ut et homo migret in deum et deus habitet in homine." (so that mankind passes over into God and God dwells in mankind)<sup>107</sup> This conforms with the Gnostic and Hermetic texts we have quoted.

The form of the link, according to Reuchlin, is language. God is *spiritus* (breath), the word is *spiratio* (breathing), and the human being *spirans* (the breather).<sup>108</sup> In the dialogue Baruchias takes this idea up by pointing out that the Hebrew words derive from an ancient language in which God, angels and humans could speak directly to one another. Through the use of the primal tongue, and especially of words so sacred that only the initiated could speak them, one was in touch with powerful numerological combinations like those of Pythagoras. In IHUH, the Tetragrammaton, *Yod*, with the form of a point and the value of 10, is the primal unity. *He* (5) is the combination of 2 (duality of the world) and 3 (the Trinity). *Vaw* (6) is composed of 1, 2 and 3 (1+2+3 or 1x2x3) and is the perfect element. The second *He*, between 1 and 10, is the human soul between the upper and lower worlds and so forms the link to return to the beginning.<sup>109</sup> Baruchias shows that this name was revealed in the Psalms.<sup>110</sup>

This wonder-working word, especially when the consonant 's', laden with symbolic significance by Reuchlin, is added to make IHSUH, can achieve the deification of humanity. But here there is a puzzle. Sidonius' impatience hardly seems to be answered in a magic which simply combines the name Ihsuh with the cross; all Capnion's illustrations of miracles that have been worked refer to the biblical past, not the present. It recalls Sidonius' remark<sup>111</sup> about pregnant mountains producing tiny mice, and there is no mention at the end of the book about whether Sidonius is now convinced, only that he "understands well enough".<sup>112</sup> Capnion's long explanation of the meaning of the Trinity, of God as *Nous*, of the psychological factors combining to form a link between the *Nous*, *mens*, *intellectus*,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 160 (my translation)

<sup>108</sup> Reuchlin also uses the image of warmth generated by food as an occult property.

<sup>109</sup> Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico*, pp. 262-84

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 250-58

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 122

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 410

*imago, sensatio*, and the senses, his stress on the identity of God and humanity through Jesus, his conclusion that the now pronouncable word is the *verbum mirificum*: all of this points away from the concrete single name (though the Church would need to hear that) towards a conception that language itself, properly infused with spirit, is the real key. This conclusion must remain highly speculative, but two minor clues throw interesting light on it. At the beginning of Book Three, in a seemingly irrelevant anecdote, Sidonius remarks how reflecting on the miraculous powers of words discussed the previous day had made him think the walls of his room were moving, and at the beginning of the conversation, in Book One, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are cited to illustrate the power of words, where Medea speaks:

... concussaue sisto,  
 Stantia concutio cantu freta, nubila pello,  
 Nubilaue induco, ventos abigoque vocoque.  
 Viperas rumpo verbis et carmine fauces.  
 Vivaue saxa sua convulsaue robora terra,  
 Et sylvas moveo, iubeoque tremiscere montes,  
 Et mugire solum, manesque exire sepulcris.  
 Te, quoque, luna, traho.

(I can allay the stormy seas, whip up calm water with my songs, dispel or draw up clouds, dismiss the winds or summon them. I can burst open snakes with spells and incantations, can move the living rocks, pluck oaks up by the roots, even whole forests; I bid the mountains shake, and the earth rumble, raise the dead from their tombs and you, the moon, I call pull from her sphere)<sup>113</sup>

a passage which inspired Prospero's description of his magic in Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

It would certainly not be unusual for a certain degree of 'masking' to be present in this book, as we have already observed that most of the Renaissance Magi felt they were sailing close to the wind, and indeed were frequently subjected to investigation or persecution, culminating in the burning of Giordano Bruno in 1600.<sup>114</sup>

Abbot Trithemius, who was in touch with Reuchlin and with whom Paracelsus may have studied, produced an enigmatic work, *Steganographia*, an amalgam of cryptography and magic which was accompanied by extravagant claims revealed, against its author's wishes, when a letter he wrote went astray. The book became a highly sought-after prize in the occult

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 98, quoting *Metamorphoses* VII, 200-207 (my translation)

<sup>114</sup> There were thus very practical reasons for secrecy, although Eliade points out (*The Forge and the Crucible*, pp. 164f.) that the sense of the religious attached to alchemical and occult disciplines required secrecy to protect the central mysteries from the ignorant and profane.

canon<sup>115</sup> long before it first appeared in print in 1606, and ensured for its author a reputation as a conjuror and sorcerer who had apparently fulfilled the wish of Emperor Maximilian I to see the spirit of his dead wife raised.<sup>116</sup> Trithemius' correspondence reveals increasing worries about his reputation,<sup>117</sup> and he was forced out of his position at Sponheim. It is from Trithemius at this time that the first reference to 'Faustus junior' can be found.<sup>118</sup>

Trithemius' pupil, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, set a puzzle which has not been given any satisfactory answer when he published, almost simultaneously, a compendium of magical arts (*De Occulta Philosophia libri tres*), in which Ficino's magic, Pico and Reuchlin's Cabala, da Vinci's proportions, Georgi's syncretistic vision of the universe and an impressive range of other occult sources, often unattributed, were brought together without much attempt to disguise their magic enthusiasm, and the *Declamatio de Incertitudine et Vanitatae Scientiarum atque Artium*, which showed the vanity and uselessness of all human arts and sciences, including magic. The *De Vanitate* contains what appears to be an explicit renunciation of the magical work, described there as "in quibus quicquid tunc per curiosam adolescentiam erratum est, nunc cautior hac palinodia recantatum volo." (in which then I erred through youthful curiosity, and now, more cautiously, wish to use this recantation to retract),<sup>119</sup> while it is clear that both at this time and later Agrippa was working on a vastly expanded version of *De Occulta Philosophia*.

In a fascinating essay, Michael Keefer traces the scholarly attempts to account for this discrepancy, from Yates' opinion that *De Vanitate* is a smokescreen used in defence of Agrippa's magic, Nauert's idea that Agrippa developed from occultist credulity by way of radical doubt to higher mysticism, or Bowen's that *De Vanitate* is in ironic mode in the genre of literary paradox, all of which Keefer finds unconvincing. His own theory, that Agrippa came to recognise that the highest form of 'Hermetic rebirth' (in which knowledge of the microcosmic material world coalesces with a Gnostic union with the One) would be indistinguishable from the heresy of Simon Magus, from which he recoiled but was unable to divorce himself, has been rejected in turn by Perrone Compagni in his introduction to the

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<sup>115</sup> See Haile (ed), *Das Faustbuch in der Wolfenbütteler Handschrift*, p. 12.

<sup>116</sup> Brough, *New Perspectives of Faust*, p. 15

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>118</sup> Palmer and More, *The Sources of the Faust Tradition*, pp. 83-6



1992 edition of *De Occulta Philosophia*. Keefer bases his theory on Agrippa's statement in

Ch 44:

Illud tandem sciendum est quia omnis nobilis anima quadruplicem habet operationem: unam divinam per imaginem divinae proprietatis, alteram intellectualem per formalitatem participationis cum intelligentiis; tertiam rationalem per perfectionem propriae essentialitatis; quartam animalem sive naturalem per communionem ad corpus et ad haec inferiora, ut nullum opus sit in tota mundi serie tam admirabile, tam excellens, tam miraculosum quod anima humana suam divinitatis imaginem complexa, quam vocant magi animam stantem et non cadentem, sua propria virtute absque omni externo adminiculo non queat efficere. Forma igitur totius magicae virtutis est ab anima hominis stante et non cadente.

(This then must be known: because every noble soul has a fourfold function, a divine one according to the divine image, another intellectual one through analogy with the function of the intellect, the third a rational one through the perfection of its own essence, the fourth animal, or natural one through communion with the body and these inferior qualities; so there is no work in the whole succession of the world so admirable, so excellent, so marvellous, that the human soul, embracing its image of divinity — which the Magi call the soul standing and not falling — cannot achieve by its own virtue without any external assistance. The form, therefore, of all magical virtue, comes from the human soul standing and not falling.)<sup>120</sup>

Simon Magus, Keefer points out, called himself 'the Standing One', Compagni is able to show that the phrase is derived from Giovanni Pico, though this does not seem to me to invalidate Keefer's point. It shows rather what later writers were also to assume, that there is a fundamental affinity between doctrines condemned as daemonic heresy by the Church and the common assumptions of philosophers working within the Hermetic / Gnostic tradition, and that gnosis, the primacy of the imagination, is the key.

There can be no doubt, from the texts we have examined, that Gnostic / Hermetic thought placed the Divine simultaneously outside and within the human mind, and that all the divine functions, from creation through miracle-working to redemption, are part of the human psyche, and accessible through the imagination, while they are simultaneously beyond the individual human's rational consciousness or material existence, which, being subject to time and space, can only form a minuscule part of the cosmos it has, on the other level, itself created. For this reason, the imagination, being transcendent, can connect with the divine in itself. This model is, in its essentials, identical with the scheme developed by C.G. Jung, himself fascinated by Gnostic thought, of a conscious ego distinguishable from an unconscious which is part personal and part 'collective' or universal, i.e. transcendent, through which, by what Jung calls a process of individuation, the ego can be integrated into the Self. The Magi would have recognised this as Gnostic deification or true gnosis.

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<sup>119</sup> Agrippa, *De Incertitudine et Vanitate*, p. 104

What is meant by gnosis? Is it a purely spiritual knowledge of God, an identity of the human being with the intellect, the spiritual part of the human mind uncontaminated by the material or the passions associated with it? Or is it the complete knowledge of the inner and outer worlds whose ideas, being both intellectual and intimately bound up with the material, inspired and seduced by it, may only become incarnate through the imagination and can only remain 'standing and not falling' if they are stretched out between all four of Agrippa's terms to the point where rational human understanding is unable to relate the opposites it is reconciling? This quantum understanding, it seems to me, was the point to which Renaissance occult thought was moving, paradoxically aware and unaware what knowledge and what power it was seeking.

It is highly significant, I think, that at precisely this point the legend of Faust should have emerged and been given potent expression in Marlowe's drama. Equally significant is the web of paradox which connects the imaginary Faust story with 'reality'. The search for a 'real' Faust, whose story might find mimetic reflection first in the folktales and Faustbuch and subsequently in literary art is shown by recent scholarship to be a wild-goose chase.<sup>121</sup>

No one doubts that there were scholars who took the name 'Faustus' as a humanist sobriquet in the first half of the sixteenth century, indeed one of Erasmus' friends bore the name,<sup>122</sup> and the references to someone called Faust in official town records or account books can be taken at face value. Thus a man who called himself 'Doctor Jörg Faustus of Heidelberg' was told to leave Ingolstadt in 1528, perhaps the same as 'Doctor Faustus, the great sodomite and black magician', who was refused entry to Nürnberg by the deputy mayor in 1532 (two years after Paracelsus had been forced to leave). This Faustus, however, is unlikely to have been the one paid ten guilders by the bishop of Bamberg, whose diocese included Nürnberg and who had laid down death at the stake as the penalty for sorcery, as a reward for casting the bishop's horoscope in 1520.

Brough argues convincingly that all the other early Faust references (or *Faustsplitter*, as they are known) that are remotely reliable relate back in one way or another to a letter written by Trithemius to his friend Virdung in 1507. It was a letter written at a difficult time for

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<sup>120</sup> Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia*, p. 544

<sup>121</sup> I am relying to a large extent in the remarks that follow on Brough's researches; in an admirable study, he applies a laudable sceptical historicism to Faust mythology.

Trithemius, and was intended for later publication, so that by distancing himself from a "vagabond, a babbler and a rogue, who deserves to be thrashed so that he may not henceforth rashly venture to profess in public things so execrable to the holy Church,"<sup>123</sup> one who called himself, among other things, "the younger Faust" and "the second magus",<sup>124</sup> a man moreover who Trithemius has not actually met and about whom he repeats in great detail things Virdung apparently knew already, the letter begins to look like a deliberate ploy. Brough sensibly asks, "Who is saying what to whom under what circumstances and to what purpose?"<sup>125</sup> and shows that most of the people who referred to Faust either wanted to divert criticism and negative aspersions from themselves or their friends, or else were trying to denigrate their enemies, or alternatively wished to lay claim to a connection with what rapidly developed into a lucrative legend.<sup>126</sup>

Brough shows that many of the later Faust references betray similar ulterior motives, as when Konrad Muth wrote a letter in 1513 to Heinrich Urbanus in Erfurt, telling him about what Faustus has apparently been saying in Erfurt! Muth, again, has not met him, but appeals "May the theologians rise up against him and not try to destroy the philosopher Reuchlin!"<sup>127</sup> Similarly Conrad Gesner, in 1561, wrote a letter comparing Paracelsus with Faustus; the intention clearly was to tar Paracelsus, with whom he had an old score to settle, with the same brush.

A similar process is probably behind discrepancies in places. Heidelberg is mentioned in connection with Faust, but also Krakow; his exploits are associated with the Duchy of Württemberg, but also with Wittenberg and Prague. Keefer shows how much of the development of the Faust legend, as it was to be published in the Spies *Faustbuch*, shows the influence of Luther, whose *Table Talk* was also the source of parts of the legend. Some of these stories can be traced back to stories told about the Prague magician Žýto (translatable as 'Ryecorn'), but others took the form of a direct comparison between Faust and Simon

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<sup>122</sup> Brough, *New Perspectives of Faust*, pp. 11f.

<sup>123</sup> Palmer and More, *The Sources of the Faust Tradition*, p. 83

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 84

<sup>125</sup> Brough, *New Perspectives of Faust*, p. 32

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 32

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 83



Magus, which Keefer rightly sees as highly significant.<sup>128</sup> For the Protestant reformers, tales told about sorcerers — believed by Luther to be generally in league with the Devil — had the effect of contrasting a caricature of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition with the Reformation's own oppositional ideas, as they were concerned to set up an alternative authority rather than to preach a gospel of individual deification. It was thus in the interests of Protestantism as much as Catholicism to see the Devil's work in magical manipulation; both denominations predicated salvation on the submissive virtues of faith or grace rather than the deificatory rebirth towards which the Gnostic / Hermetic thinkers were moving. It has been pointed out frequently how this combination of forces was conducive to the 16th and 17th century witchcraft crazes, and succeeded in popularizing, sensationalizing and accrediting the notion that nigromantic arts were in regular use from the bottom to the top of society and that they were both the trickery of imposters and simultaneously a radical threat: the paradoxical image of the magician which has persisted to the present day and which is inherent in the ambiguity of 'conjurer'.

The evidence is thus decisively in favour of the Faust legend being built on the stories of Simon Magus, known through Irenaeus and the *Recognitions*, as a prototype of a Gnostic / Hermetic Magus, associated with popular legends and superstitions combined with stories of famous people (Agrippa's dog and his death at an inn, Trithemius showing spirits of the dead), tapping the power of caricature which depends equally on its grain of truth and grotesque exaggeration. I am not suggesting that the Faust legend needs to be traced back to these people as a direct cause or inspiration, or even as the polemical creation of one or other contemporary faction, but rather that it crystallized simultaneously and significantly in a form related to myth the ideas and aspirations present in a context of Gnostic revival.<sup>129</sup>

How did all this reach Marlowe? There is little doubt that Marlowe's primary source was the English translation of the Spies *Faustbuch* by 'P. F.'. Much discussion has taken place on who P. F. might be, whether the 1592 edition is the first or not, how many original *Faustbücher* preceded Spies, or whether, instead, there was a Latin original, in prose or as a play, but the clear similarities throughout link Marlowe's text to the P. F. translation, known

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<sup>128</sup> Keefer (ed.), Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, p. xxxviii f.

<sup>129</sup> I would agree with Empson, though he refers it chiefly to Copernicanism, that "a very large popular mental activity has expressed itself in boiling up the Faust legend." (*Faustus and the Censor*, p. 87)



as the *English Faust Book* (EFB). Marlowe, a pupil of King's School Canterbury and graduate of Cambridge, would also have been fluent in Latin and would have had access to a wide range of books, so it can be assumed that he could easily have read the major works in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.<sup>130</sup> Debate continues to rage on Marlowe's personality, as elusive as his appearance, and critics who wish to see in *Doctor Faustus* a defence of religious orthodoxy entirely discount the accusations made, under torture or threat, by Barnes and Kyd, but there is enough evidence of individualism and iconoclasm in both the fact that Marlowe wrote plays (at this time not the occupation of an educated gentleman) and in the themes of those plays themselves (the 'scourge of God' reaching out for infinite conquest and burning religious texts, the homosexual king sodomized by death), to say nothing of his espionage activities, that an interest in alternative modes of thought can be assumed. Apart from this Marlowe had contacts linking him much more closely to the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.



2. John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*, in a coloured print by Adam McLean

Just outside London, at Mortlake, lived John Dee, England's very own Magus,<sup>131</sup> whose published work, including a preface to Euclid and the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, (combining alchemy, cabala, and Pythagorean number symbolism)<sup>132</sup> as well as writing on navigation, show the characteristic Gnostic / Hermetic pursuit of knowledge on the parallel levels of spirit and material. Dee's library contained large numbers of magical

<sup>130</sup> For instance, the standard translations of Plato were those by Ficino, published coupled with the *Theologia Platonica*.

<sup>131</sup> French refers to him in these terms, although Clulee announces a note of revisionary caution; in the end however, Clulee's conclusions, particularly as they refer to religion and magic, are not substantially different.

<sup>132</sup> The 24 theorems of the enigmatic *Monas Hieroglyphica* show how, from point, line and circle, the planetary symbols can be obtained. By meditation on these, the spiritual secrets of the macrocosm can be applied in the microcosm. The particular position of Mercury introduces an alchemical section, which is followed by Pythagorean and Cabalistic correspondences. Walton shows how Dee uses the three techniques of Cabala: notarion, tsiruf and gematria. Central to the whole scheme is the progression from the one (monad) through the dual and ternary to the quaternity of the elements, and how they can be restored to the monad. Josten relates this to Trithemius' letter prescribing an ascent to the monad 'through fire and love', without which the Magus would be powerless. Jung, with reference to Dorn, shows how this is related to the principles in the *Tabula Smaragdina*. He draws the following analogy: "The 'four' are the four elements and the monad is the original unity which reappears in the 'denarius' (the number 10), the goal of the opus; it is the unity of the personality projected into the unity of the stone. The descent is analytic, a separation into the four components of wholeness; the ascent synthetic, a putting together of the denarius. The discussion is on which, ascent or descent, must be first. (Jung, *CW 14*, pp. 221f.)



texts in printed or manuscript editions.<sup>133</sup> Dee had obtained favour at court, partly through his provision of horoscopes for the Queen, but was also regarded with much distrust, having enemies at court and being suspected by many of sorcery; a charge against which he felt he needed to defend himself both before and after his stay in Central Europe on an enigmatic mission which took him to Krakow, Prague (where an apparently successful interview with Emperor Rudolph II did not bring him the influence he hoped for at the Imperial Court), and Třeboň, where, living under the protection of the influential Rožmberk family, he conducted many of his experiments in angel magic with Edward Kelley.

These were in the form of séances at a specially prepared table insulated from the floor with inscribed wax tablets on which a spherical crystal 'scrying' glass and an Aztec black obsidian mirror were used to view spirits which were summoned.<sup>134</sup> Clulce notes that this took place after simple prayers and without the preparations and rituals referred to by Ficino, Agrippa and others, but ironically the messages the angels brought closely resembled traditional cabalistic invocations,<sup>135</sup> and the results were impressive enough for Dee to have become obsessed with them. The work involved a system of angel magic which Dee studiously noted down, involving the 'Book of Enoch' and the '30 Calls of the Aethyrs'. At one point Kelley experienced a vision of a mandala resembling a four-gated city, which was inscribed on a gold disc. Kelley objected at times that the spirits were demonic rather than angelic; the magic they urged finally involved making a solemn agreement followed by sexual communion between Dee, Kelley and both their wives. There is a sudden alteration in the spirit messages at this point, including the following extraordinary passage, reminiscent of the Gnostic Helen:

I am the Daughter of Fortitude, and ravished every hour, from my youth. For behold, I am Understanding, and Science dwelleth in me; and the heavens oppress me, they covet and desire me with infinite appetite: few or none that are earthly have embraced me, for I am shadowed with the Circle of the Stone, and covered with the morning Clouds. My feet are swifter than the winds, and my hands are sweeter than the morning dew. My garments are from the beginning, and my dwelling place is in my self. The Lion knoweth not where I walk, neither do the beasts of the field understand me. I am defloured, and yet a virgin: I sanctifie, and am not sanctified. Happy is he that imbraceth me: for in the right season I am sweet, and in the day full of pleasure.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>133</sup> For example, he possessed three copies of Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*. Roberts and Watson, *John Dee's Library Catalogue*.

<sup>134</sup> These artefacts, and the gold disc mentioned below, can be seen in the British Museum. Their use is described in Skinner's introduction to Casaubon, *A True and Faithful Relation*

<sup>135</sup> Clulce, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, pp. 206, 210-14

<sup>136</sup> Casaubon, *A True and Faithful Relation*, Part 2, p. 25



Kelley is now generally written off in England as a charlatan who took advantage of Dee and played the role of an evil genius exploiting the deluded master.<sup>137</sup> In the Czech lands, on the other hand, he continues to enjoy a reputation as a serious alchemist of considerably more importance than Dee.<sup>138</sup> Stories of Faust and Mephistopheles must have resonated with anyone who knew Dee and Kelley.<sup>139</sup>

At the time Marlowe was writing *Doctor Faustus* (whether we take the late 1580s or early 1590s), Dee had just returned to Mortlake, and in a small place like Elizabethan London rumour and fact would combine to give wide currency to at the least some information about him. In addition Dee was well known to the Sidney circle and Sir Philip Sidney shows in the *Apology for Poetry* that he has read Agrippa and indicates an awareness of the Gnostic revaluation of imagination in that work which already moves towards a non-mimetic function of creative writing. Dee was also involved in the intelligence community through his foreign travels, as was Marlowe through his own espionage activities. What other contacts took place behind closed doors can only be speculated on, but we have a fascinating glimpse in Bruno's *Cena de le Ceneri*, at which Sidney and Fulke Greville were present, of the discussion on the pursuit of truth in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition of the prisci Magi in which 'the Nolan' takes the role of prophet of a new heliocentric universe of divine knowledge.

Raleigh, clearly, was influenced by the Hermetic tradition in his *History of the World*, and it was to Raleigh and his circle that Marlowe was drawn at the beginning of his career. Raleigh never seems to have taken Dee very seriously, although the two men were on friendly enough terms to have lent each other books, but Raleigh relied on Thomas Harriot (who also knew Dee) for the mathematical and navigational instruction of his captains. Harriot had a reputation as a brilliant mathematician, whose interest in the natural world was far more recognisably scientific, although he was also an alchemist, as is shown by the

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<sup>137</sup> Yates and French incline to this view. Clulce and Shumaker in *Renaissance Curiosa* take a more qualified position, suggesting a more psychologically complex personality.

<sup>138</sup> Svátek, 'Anglický alchymista Kelley v Čechách'

<sup>139</sup> The suggestion by Silvani that Dee himself might have translated the *Faustbuch* is rightly rejected. Dee's turgid English style and earnestness are quite incompatible with the wry interjections by P. F.

papers he left;<sup>140</sup> he developed a system of phonetic transcription and played a major part in Raleigh's Virginia expedition of 1595, learning the Algonquin language and transcribing it in an alphabet, says Aubrey, "like Devills", by which he means that the phonetic symbols resembled the sigils used in grimoires for summoning spirits.

The confusion is typical. There are numerous instances of sciences involving the use of symbols or instruments or complex mechanical devices being mistaken for sorcery or devilry among ignorant people; mathematical books were liable to be burnt as conjuring books in the 16th century, according to Thomas<sup>141</sup> and Zetterberg,<sup>142</sup> and one is reminded of Aubrey's famous anecdote about Thomas Allen's watch.<sup>143</sup>

However, Harriot was not merely a mathematician, and his incisive and independent mind was apparently not averse to questioning religious assumptions, at least in his youth. Thus his reputation inspired Lord Chief Justice Popham at Raleigh's trial to single him out as an atheist and evil influence;<sup>144</sup> he had been attacked earlier in a tract written in 1591 by Robert Parsons, a Jesuit, aimed at Raleigh:

Of Sir VValter Rawley's Schoole of Atheisme by the waye, and of the Coniurer that is M. thereof, and of the diligence vsed to get young gentlemen to this schoole, where in both Moyses, and our sauior, the olde, and the new Testamente are iested at, and the schollers taught amonge other thinges, to spell God backwarde.<sup>145</sup>

Shirley, quoting this, points out that both Dee and Harriot believed themselves to be referred to. Famously, also, the Baines accusation against Marlowe includes, as point 2, "He affirmeth that Moyses was but a Jugler and that one Heriots being Sir W. Raleghs man can do more than he" as well as point 11: "That the woman of Samaria and her sister were Whores and that Christ knew them dishonestly."<sup>146</sup> All this suggests, not that the accusations

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<sup>140</sup> Shirley, *Thomas Harriot*, pp.241-87

<sup>141</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 430f.

<sup>142</sup> J. P. Zetterberg, "The Mistaking of 'the Mathematicks' for Magic in Tudor and Stuart England", p. 85

<sup>143</sup> John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, p. 167. The maids in a house where Allen was staying assumed the thing ticking in a case was his devil, so they lifted it by its chain with a pair of tongs and threw it out of the window, in order to drown the devil in the moat. However it got caught on a branch, confirming the maids in their opinion, but saving the very expensive watch. Aubrey notes: "In those darke times, Astrologer, Mathematician, and Conjuror were accounted the same things".

<sup>144</sup> Shirley, *Thomas Harriot*, pp. 316f.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180

<sup>146</sup> Maclure, *Marlowe: the Critical Heritage*, p. 37

can be taken at face value, but that they might well represent the ignorant response of uninformed people to talk of Gnostic / Hermetic themes.<sup>147</sup>

Brough notes that 'Johannes Faustus' or 'Johann Faust' was known in stories published and circulated in the 1530s and 1540s as the inventor of printing. This occurred because Gutenberg's partner, who subsequently ejected Gutenberg from the firm, was a man named Johann Fust. Thus the name of Faust is intimately connected with the revolutionary new technology, what McLuhan describes as "Gutenberg's gift: uniform, continuous and indefinitely repeatable bits",<sup>148</sup> which he sees as leading to "intensified perspective and the fixed point of view" as well as "nationalism, industrialism, mass markets, and universal literacy and education".<sup>149</sup> It promoted the rise of literature and the individual reader, while at the same time stressing "detachment and non-involvement — the power to act without reacting".<sup>150</sup> Marlowe himself, whose play was to open a perspective on a Gnostic / Hermetic view of humanity combining the heights of Renaissance speculation with the depths of superstition and demonology, would be murdered shortly afterwards in the unsavoury company of a group of men involved, like him, in espionage. The 'spy' was killed by a dagger entering the brain through the eye.

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<sup>147</sup> Without needing to assume a romanticised 'School of Night', as Bradbrook does, or to see the influence of an idealised Harriot or Bruno behind Marlowe's work, as in Clark (*Raleigh and Marlowe, a Study in Elizabethan Fustian*), it is clear that someone associated with these circles would be aware of the intellectual currents I have outlined.

<sup>148</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 127

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 184

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 184



## Chapter Two

### Standing and Falling: Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*

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In seeking to establish the nature of the Faust myth as it is presented in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and setting out the parameters within which its interpretation can be justified, it will be necessary to deal with three main areas of uncertainty first. These are the sources the text is drawn from, the authenticity of the text as we now know it, and the diversity between the written text and the experience of theatrical performance. Each of these will reveal fractures which undermine the concept of authority and prefigure postmodern techniques of destabilisation, which have been said to indicate the disappearance of the author and the indeterminacy of the text. Without wishing to minimize the ambivalences generated by these fractures, I will suggest that the play of forces also tends to cohere in a unifying movement which still allows the concept of a work that can be read, performed, and discussed. Each reader and director of *Doctor Faustus* is faced with the necessity to create her or his own play from different elements. On the one hand this could imply total anarchy, and frustrate any attempt at critical analysis, which may go some way towards explaining the wild diversity of views expressed about the work;<sup>1</sup> on the other hand in practice interpretations need to satisfy certain criteria in order to be convincing. Among these we should include the need to be logically coherent, textually justifiable, aesthetically satisfying, theatrically effective and culturally relevant.

As a rule, Elizabethan plays were not published officially until they were considered to have had an adequate run in the theatre, so published texts, even if directly overseen by the author, might differ considerably from what was originally written in manuscript. They

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<sup>1</sup> Interpretations range from the religious (Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Calvinist), the heretical, the atheistic, through psychological (Freudian, Jungian), portraying Faustus as hero, villain, flawed genius, fool, ascetic, hedonist, repressed old monk, spokesman for subversion, for orthodoxy, proponent of transcendent magic or material reality. Some see him as damned, others not; his damnation, if it happens, has been seen as a punishment for pride, curiosity, despair, hubris, rejection of the body, acceptance of the body, having sex with demons, trying to have sex at all, reading the scriptures incorrectly, excessive cleverness or plain stupidity!

might or might not take into account changes made during rehearsals or performances. The process of rehearsal, calling on the creativity within and between actors, is bound to have an effect on the text. Performances involve a degree of interaction between audience and performers, who soon learn to optimize the effect of delivery, emphasis, or stage business to contribute to the success of the play as a whole. William Empson has argued persuasively that the significance of particular lines, and consequently even the whole message of the play, could depend entirely on the acting or the way the lines were delivered, and he points out that this might never become apparent in the written text.<sup>2</sup> The bewildering variety of 'readings' of even a universally accepted text in different productions bears witness to the 'play' within the relationship between text and theatrical experience. Critics who are more aware of the subtleties of text than of the palette of theatrical performance may be able to present a coherent reading, but are unlikely to create imaginative or convincing theatre.<sup>3</sup> It is unrealistic to base a reading on a particular manifestation of the play, but it is important to bear in mind that a conception of the play divorced from a performance is itself only an imaginative construct.

Ultimately, however, performances and interpretative critical readings need to be orientated towards a centre, an "agent of meaning" (the term is Jerome McGann's), which has traditionally been seen as the published text; the conscientious work of textual critics has been directed at establishing the accuracy of each text, based on assumptions about authorial intention. Although it is justified to question those assumptions, experience in general indicates that a coherent text carrying the authority of a single authorial imagination is the best legitimation of the set of readings which can relate to what becomes known as the work of literature. *Doctor Faustus* provides a good example of what happens when a text is opened to a more 'democratic' process: a series of revisions, additions and excisions led to a clear degradation of the play in performance through the 17th and 18th centuries, followed by a period of total neglect, and it was only in the late 19th century, with the revival of the play based on new critical editions, that *Doctor Faustus* was again taken seriously by

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<sup>2</sup> Empson, *Faustus and the Censor*

<sup>3</sup> One needs only to compare accounts, for example, of performances like the Clifford Williams or Barry Kyle productions in Stratford, or the freer adaptation by Jerzy Grotowski, with the earnest and plodding account of Fredson Bowers' production in Jones, *A Textual Analysis of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus with Director's Book*

audiences or readers.<sup>4</sup> Here we are faced with a second difficulty: there is no single text which can be safely judged to represent Marlowe's original intentions.

The earliest extant texts are the 1604 edition, of which there is a single copy, reprinted in 1609, 1610 and 1611. This version, entered in the Stationer's Register on 7 January 1601, has become known as the A-Text. A substantially different version, the B-Text, was published in 1616, fourteen years after Philip Henslowe had paid William Birde and Samuel Rowley £4 for 'adicyones in doctor fostes'.

Ironically enough, it was Greg, with his insistence on the importance of verifiable copy-text, who seems to have caused most postmodernist confusion about the authorial intention behind *Doctor Faustus*. While Greg's rationale leads to a search for a text which "emerges from its author's imagination trailing clouds of glory" before "shades of the prison-house of unauthorised, ill-advised and self-censored change close down upon it",<sup>5</sup> his decision, now regarded as idiosyncratic, to prefer the 1616 B-Text, has thrown much 20th century study of *Faustus* into turbulent chaos.

Greg's argument, briefly, was that the A-Text showed signs of 'memorial reconstruction', in other words had been pirated, leaving gaps where memory might have failed or where cuts had been made for a provincial tour, whereas the 1616 version was based on manuscript, the so-called 'foul papers'. Greg also believed that the 1616 text was superior in content and form. It is certainly true that the A-Text seems oddly truncated in places. If we posit a five-act structure — although the act and scene divisions in modern editions are editorial assumptions,<sup>6</sup> and neither the A nor B Text has them, there are good reasons to accept such divisions — the A versions of Acts III and IV, where Faustus visits the Pope and the Emperor, are very short indeed. The B version, with its extended sub-plots about the rescue of Bruno and the Knight Benvolio's attempt to get even with Faustus, seems to provide a more balanced distribution. More controversially, though, Greg's preferred reading of the B-Text has ideological implications, as the B-Text is a much more

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<sup>4</sup> See, in this context, E.M. Butler, *The Fortunes of Faust*, pp. 52-68. Butler goes on to show how the chaotic *prima materia* into which the play sank continued to throw up new manifestations of the Faust archetype in different European cultures.

<sup>5</sup> Pizer, 'Self-Censorship and Textual Editing' in McGann, *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation*, p. 147. Keefer's amusing Neoplatonic analogy of the hypostasis of the divine text into the debased world of copyists, compositors, printers etc. is also appropriate: Marlowe; *Doctor Faustus* (ed. Keefer), p. xvii



orthodox play in religious terms, containing as it does far more moralising, and conventional presentations of heaven and hell in Act V. Keefer has shown that the preference for B, which originated with Kirschbaum, is founded on a circular argument. The B-Text is chosen because it assumes a hierarchy of moral values which the audience must understand and accept, and this orthodox scheme is validated by subsequent reference to the B-Text!<sup>7</sup>

Editors after Greg, in deference to his scholarship, felt obliged to accept the arguments, even apparently against their better judgement,<sup>8</sup> until the work of critics like Kuryama, Ormorod and Keefer led to a rehabilitation of the A-Text. Open warfare broke out, with critics lining up on either side to defend their own text, usually with the proviso that the question would never be settled, and that one would simply have to live with the fact that two distinct plays existed. The argument has moved on since the publication of the Revels Edition *Doctor Faustus* edited by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen in 1993. Independently, they reached similar conclusions to Keefer in his 1991 edition, and showed convincingly that not only could the Greg/ Kirschbaum arguments be refuted,<sup>9</sup> it was also possible to see in the 1604 compositors' work evidence that they had set up type from bundles of manuscript which were not continuous but interleaved, with different manuscript pages marking new scenes or important entrances. There is no reason to suppose a memorial reconstruction should be put together in such an unusual way. Bevington and Rasmussen come to the conclusion, following Bowers, that the A-Text was set from 'the foul papers of a collaboration'.<sup>10</sup> This would confirm the general view that even the A-Text is unlikely to have been entirely Marlowe's work. The new evidence would seem to suggest that the striking differences in style and quality between the serious passages and the comedy are not the result of Marlowe's loss of interest in the comic sections, but that he did not write them as manuscript. The question of collaboration will have interesting implications, particularly for the comic scenes.

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<sup>6</sup> Marlowe; *Doctor Faustus* (ed. Keefer), p. lxxi

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. xvi. It is interesting to note the correspondence between critical judgements and textual preferences. Thus interpretations of the play as a defence of orthodoxy, whether religious or philosophical, usually require the B Text. This is even true of critics like Moore, in *Aspiring Minds and Lumps of Clay* who places the play in a Gnostic context to warn against "dangerous transcendental tendencies at the heart of his world and ours." (p. 379)

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Bowers

<sup>9</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (ed. Bevington & Rasmussen), pp. 62-77

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 69

Turning our attention now to the A-Text as a record of the play of Doctor Faustus in what Keefer refers to as the "originary intentional horizon",<sup>11</sup> we are entitled to enquire what relation it bears to the Gnostic / Hermetic context outlined in the previous chapter.

Surprisingly, in view of the number of studies of the play which have been published, very few commentators take this context seriously into account. Many treat the play within an orthodox Christian framework, and a rather naïve one at that, with heaven and hell as more or less realistic topologies, God as a distinct, albeit absent, character, and the damnation or otherwise of Faustus as a signal of authorial approval or disapproval. Mebane divides the field into three categories:

those who believe that Faustus and Mephistophilis express the dramatist's own rebellious criticism of traditional ideas and institutions, those who interpret Faustus as entirely orthodox, and those who see the play as ambivalent.<sup>12</sup>

The two extremes correspond to what Bevington and Rasmussen term the romantic and the orthodox. Mebane singles out Harry Levin's account of Faustus as an 'overreacher', unwilling to accept the structures of an authority based on intellectual foundations which he sees as flawed. These accounts depend, however, on the acceptance of a particular cosmology, in which rebellion against God takes the form of celestial treachery, or blasphemy, or simply an atheism which confirms the conventional idea of God by walking away from it. Within a Gnostic / Hermetic framework, on the other hand, Faustus' rejection of conventional knowledge and learning are unsurprising, because they limit the infinite potential of the human being. At the beginning of the play, in a reminder of Agrippa's *De Incertitudine*, but with a generalizing theatrical sweep which does not balk at dodgy quotation, Faustus penetrates to the heart of each discipline, seen here not as a mere *Fakultätenschau* but as an art with an 'end' in view. Faustus is seeking the knowledge that will lead beyond human success: a perfect orator, a rich successful doctor, a well-feed lawyer living off chancery cases — none of these can satisfy him, because all remain limited; the lawyer merely interprets the laws, the doctor cannot operate beyond the boundary of death, the philosopher is subject to the rules of logic and the tyranny of '*on kai me on*', of

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<sup>11</sup> Marlowe; *Doctor Faustus* (ed. Keefer), p. xxii

things as they are. He regards the priest's profession as superior to that of teacher, doctor or lawyer, but rejects this too in a much-discussed syllogism which, though not based on accurate quotation, is a concise statement of his, and many subsequent thinkers', objections to Christianity of whatever denomination: its determinism (a subjection to a creator of everything including original sin, or to a blind demiurge) and its dependence on total submission (in the form of reliance on divine mercy or grace). The Gnostic / Hermetic tradition, by contrast, offers a framework in which a human being may justifiably aspire to deification, promising power and the chance to manipulate the material world:

All things that move between the quiet poles  
Shall be at my command.<sup>13</sup>

and to move beyond it to identity with God, where the play's poetry carries clear echoes of Ficino, Pico or Agrippa:

Emperors and kings  
Are but obeyed in their several provinces,  
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;  
But his dominion that exceeds in this  
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man.  
A strong magician is a mighty god.<sup>14</sup>

It is worth noting that the condition of being a god is equated with the extent of "the mind of man". The inner and the outer are equivalent and in a sense identical. This, it will be remembered, is the alchemical first principle of the *Tabula Smaragdina*, on which all magical operation is predicated, and is a clear indication that Marlowe is not restricting himself to a conventional cosmological framework. Although not all the audience will be expected to appreciate it,<sup>15</sup> and may be as far from comprehension as the clowns who steal Faustus' conjuring books, anyone aware of the Gnostic / Hermetic currents of thinking will appreciate that Marlowe's characters are moving simultaneously on the level of human

<sup>12</sup> Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age*, p.115. The main trends in critical discussion of Doctor Faustus are summed up in Tydeman and Thomas, *Christopher Marlowe, the State of the Art*, as well as in the introductions to the editions by Keefer and Bevington and Rasmussen.

<sup>13</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (ed. Bevington & Rasmussen), I.i.58f. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., I.i.59-64

<sup>15</sup> Indeed Empson suggests that it was important that not everything was clear, so as to avoid difficulties with the censor. Referring to the *Faustbook* he writes: "The book needs to be highly spiced, because it is on the edge of voicing the actual problems which face the mass reader, and yet it must have a ready defence against any accusation that it has said anything important. A very large popular mental activity has expressed itself in boiling up the Faust legend, and the text that sums it up must make sure that the fog never clears sufficiently to excite complaint." *Faustus and the Censor*, p. 87.



society in the material world and within a landscape of the human mind which corresponds to a religious and cosmological drama.

Faustus rejects conventional knowledge because it limits him to things as they are; he desires absolute knowledge because his transcendent imagination is dissatisfied with subordination to the restrictions of perceived reality; he also desires the power that such knowledge can give him. He seeks to become a free agent in the sense proclaimed by the *Asclepius* and echoed in Pico's *Oration*, standing ahead of all things, and following the Gnostic tradition he chooses the path of magic to access this knowledge. Through a metonymic process of correspondences which are textual ("lines, circles, signs, letters and characters")<sup>16</sup> he seeks a power within himself which can overcome the constraints of the material world in which he is confined: In Jungian terms he is reaching out beyond his conscious mind to the forces of the unconscious.



3. Dee's Seal of Aemeth, for summoning angels

The circle, often completed with a square and triangle, or pentagrams symbolic of the proportions of a human being as the Anthropos and image of God, was a feature of conjurations described by Scot or Agrippa, derived from the grimoires, or of the ceremonial table used by Dee for 'screying'. (fig. 3) According to the *Clavicula Salomonis* or Agrippa's *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, the circle afforded protection from the power of the spirits which might be called up; in other words it afforded a symbolic space for

In the play, he does this by using formulae of conjuration. At a propitious time (night) and in a propitious place (a grove, presumably in the woods, symbolic of the thicket of the unconscious) he draws a circle inscribed with numinous names only partially accessible to the conscious intellect. This numinous and ceremonial approach to contact with the unconscious is a feature of both magic and conventional religious practice.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, I.i.53

<sup>17</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 27-57



consciousness which was not immediately immersed in the elements of the unconscious, as might happen in dreams or in madness.

Marlowe's concern for authenticity is evidence for the centrality of this scene; it is no mere stage show played for laughs or shock value. Valdes and Cornelius have instructed Faustus in the books to use:

And bear wise Bacon's and Albanus' works,  
The Hebrew Psalter, and New Testament<sup>18</sup>

a passage which suggests Marlowe had Reuchlin in front of him with the list "et Robertus et Bacon et Abanus et Picatrix".<sup>19</sup> Reuchlin also stresses the importance of the time (for Capnion it must be day) and the appropriate place, and, it will be recalled, Reuchlin goes on to describe the efficacy of the Tetragrammaton (derived from the Psalms) and the pronounceable IHSUH (from the New Testament). Faustus' form of invocation bears close similarities with one to be found in the fourth book of Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*:<sup>20</sup> "A prayer to God, to be said in the four parts of the world, in the Circle". After calling the various names of God and cautioning that "these Spirits which I call by thy judgement may be bound and constrained to come [ ... ], not hurting any creature, neither injuring nor terrifying me or my fellows, nor hurting any other creature, and affrighting no man; but let them be obedient to my requests, in all these things which I command them" the magician shall "stand in the middle of the Circle, and hold his hand towards the Pentacle, and say:

Per Pentaculum Salomonis invocavi, dent mihi responsum verum. [ ... ] Ego vos invoco, & invocando vos conjure, atque supernae Majestatis munitus virtute, potenter impero, per eum qui dixit, & factum est, & cui obediunt omnes creaturae: et per hoc nomen ineffabile, Tetragrammaton [IHUH] Jehovah, in qua est plasmatum omne seculum, qua audio elementa corruunt, aër concutitur, mare retrograditur, ignis extinguitur, terra tremit [ ... ] quareneus citò & sine mora & omni occasione remota, ab universis mundi partibus veniatis, & rationabiliter de omnibus quaeconque interrogavero, respondeatis vos, & veniatis pacifice, visibles, & affabiles [ ... ] et sine omni ambiguitate<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, I.i.157

<sup>19</sup> Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico*, p. 124. The combination of names seems to have puzzled editors, cf. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (ed. Bevington & Rasmussen), p. 121.

<sup>20</sup> This book, which modern authors persist in calling 'spurious', was well known in Marlowe's time. It contains practical instructions for ceremonial and invocatory magic, and, with the exception of a short text at the beginning, does not purport to be by Agrippa. It contains a treatise on geomancy, the magical elements of Peter de Abano, treatises on astronomical geomancy and the nature of spirits, and the 'Arbatel of Magick'.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *His Book of Occult Philosophy*, trans. Turner, (Magical Elements of Peter de Abano, pp. 84f

The result of the invocation is that Mephistopheles<sup>22</sup> appears, first as a conventional stage devil, and then as an "old Franciscan Friar". Marlowe takes care to distance the audience from both conventional stage representations and conventional anti-Catholic propaganda — the Franciscans were exempt from many of the criticisms levelled during the Reformation at monastic orders — to introduce this projection of a split in Faustus' own personality.<sup>23</sup> The projection of an analytically divided part of what is felt, in its previous unconscious state, to be an original unity, is the mirror image of the Gnostic creation process. It allows a 'reality' to become perceptible and apparently exterior and autonomous (albeit with the power of invisibility), although its relationship with the 'creating' centre is reversible in a quantum manner. Just as different ways of measuring light allow it to be seen more as a wave or more as a particle in quantum mechanics, so the 'real' projection either influences the subject's psyche or is influenced by it. The process is neatly summed up by Mephistopheles:

*Faustus:* Did not my conjuring speeches raise thee? Speak.  
*Mephistopheles:* That was the cause, but yet *per accidens*.<sup>24</sup>

The 'conjuring' of the spirit unleashes a symbiotic relationship between imagination and reality in which chance (*per accidens*) corresponds with a particular state of mind:

For when we hear one rack the name of God,  
 Abjure the Scriptures and his Saviour Christ,  
 We fly in hope to get his glorious soul,  
 Nor will we come unless he use such means  
 Whereby he is in danger to be damned.<sup>25</sup>

Mephistopheles claims to be "a servant to great Lucifer" and to live in Hell, which, he points out, is also coextensive and equal in its (negative) power with the human mind:

*Faustus:* How comes it then that thou art out of hell?  
*Mephistopheles:* Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.<sup>26</sup>

*Mephistopheles:* Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed

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<sup>22</sup> I am following the spelling in the Revels Edition. The name is more commonly given as Mephistophilis. Possible derivations of the name (the light / right is not a friend) are given in Zitelmann, *Germanisch-Romanisch Monatsschrift* XIV, 1926: 65f. Empson, in exasperation at the plethora of different spellings, abbreviates him to Meph.

<sup>23</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, I.iii.46f. It is striking how often Faustus refers to himself in the second or third person, the only one of Marlowe's protagonists to do so regularly. It is a technique used by Shakespeare (*Lear*, 'Poor Tom') to suggest a radical destabilisation of the conscious personality, in which the projection of an autonomous complex becomes a 'natural' development. Cole, in *Christopher Marlowe and the Renaissance of Tragedy*, also sees Mephistopheles as intimately connected with Faustus' psyche: "...some archetypal root, a "meta-myth" of the Autonomous Self, in which the yearning to be one's own creator and to remake the world to suit one's own unlimited desires "explodes" ironically into self-contradiction and self-destruction. That myth is not focused on the oppressive Other but on the volatile enemy within." (p. 147).

<sup>24</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, I iii 46f.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, I.iii.47-52

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, I.iii.77f.



In one self place, for where we are is hell<sup>27</sup>

Faustus: Have you any pain to torture others?

Mephistopheles: As great as have the human souls of men.<sup>28</sup>

As such he appears in the form of the Shadow, the normally repressed counterpart of the conscious psyche, and is at first sight an 'evil spirit'. However, the emphasis from his first appearance on is on his connection with Lucifer, the light-bringer: he is also the carrier of knowledge and enlightenment, and is therefore to be compared both with the Gnostic serpent described in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*<sup>29</sup> and with the figure of Hermes / Mercurius himself, which plays such a major part in the alchemical *opus*. Jung's key essay 'The Spirit Mercurius'<sup>30</sup> will help to illuminate some of the characteristics of this ambiguous figure.

Jung points out that Mercurius in alchemy cannot simply be taken as the equivalent of mercury, the metal. Drawing on experiences from psychotherapy, he describes instead how

preoccupation with an unknown object acts as an almost irresistible bait for the unconscious to project itself into the unknown nature of the object and to accept the resultant perception, and the interpretation deduced from it, as objective.<sup>31</sup>

The object does not cease to be an objective reality, but has entered into a symbiotic relationship with the unconscious, which sees it as something entirely separate from itself, but often charged with an affective or numinous power. Mercurius, in the alchemical texts, is a dangerous spirit, often represented by creatures like the dragon, the lion (red or green), and the raven. He is also associated with the *lumen naturae*, "the source of mystical knowledge second only to the holy revelation of the Scriptures", but of a different nature:

It seems, however, that the alchemists did not understand hell, or its fire, as absolutely outside of God or opposed to him, but rather as an internal component of the deity, which must indeed be so if God is held to be *coincidentia oppositorum*.<sup>32</sup>

Mercurius is also spirit: '*servus fugitivus*', or, punningly, '*cervus fugitivus*',<sup>33</sup> and as such a projection of the unconscious psyche as a whole "such as always takes place when the inquiring mind lacks the necessary self-criticism in investigating an unknown quantity",<sup>34</sup> This unconscious projection would include, as we have said, the Shadow side,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., II.i.124f.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., II.i.43f.

<sup>29</sup> See p. 29

<sup>30</sup> Jung, *Collected Works* 13, pp. 191-250

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 205

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 209f.

<sup>33</sup> Note in this context the play's references to Actaeon.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 211

which, in Jungian psychology, contains the repressed instinctual nature<sup>35</sup> known in Freudian terminology as the 'id'. As such he is deceitful, a trickster. "It is said of him that he 'runs round the earth and enjoys equally the company of the good and the wicked.'"<sup>36</sup> Jung quotes the text *Aurelia Occulta* with its graphic description of a "poison-dripping dragon":

I contain the light of nature; I am dark and light; I come forth from heaven and earth; I am known and yet do not exist at all; by virtue of the sun's rays all colours shine in me, and all metals. I am the carbuncle of the sun, the most noble purified earth, through which you may change copper, iron, tin, and lead into gold.<sup>37</sup>

Mercurius (Hermes) is hermaphrodite, and ageless, three and one (in a mirroring of the trinity and as a derivation of 'trismegistus'), associated with the triple-headed Hecate, can create storms, but in the hands of a true adept can become the philosopher's stone.

Astrologically, Mercurius is closely related with the moon and Venus, but also with Saturn, which some alchemical texts associate in their turn with the demiurge and with Beelzebub. At the same time, through his duplicitous nature, he can turn good to evil and evil to good, so is also associated with the Holy Spirit. Jung concludes by comparing Mercurius with the classical god Hermes: "Hermes is a god of thieves and cheats, but also a god of revelation who gave his name to a whole philosophy."<sup>38</sup> In the figure of Mephistopheles can be seen a projection of the power of the imagination, a two-edged weapon which can easily give "more than thou hast wit to ask".<sup>39</sup>

The story of the conjuring of Mephistopheles and the pact he demands is only one part of Marlowe's play. Indeed its disparate nature and some of the difficulties critics have found with it may well stem from the fact that Marlowe seems to have fused three different types of plays: the medieval morality play, with its chorus and good and evil angels, the folk-play, or mummers' play, with its free improvisation on a set theme and its use of a 'quête' of apparently arbitrary characters, and the new type of expressive poetic drama which Marlowe was pioneering and which Shakespeare and Johnson were to develop to its full and as yet unsuspected potential.

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<sup>35</sup> Thus the association of Mephistopheles with the 'animal' stretching from Agrippa's black dog 'familiar' to Goethe's poodle in *Faust I*.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 217. Mercurius shares this ability with Puck.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 218

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 233

<sup>39</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, II i 47



Marlowe would expect his audience to be aware of all three traditions, and to be more linguistically sensitive to them than we are now. The morality play, by then almost dead, would appear as a stiff relic of former times, already associated with a Roman Church structure which had been swept away. The folk play was rustic, humorous, dependent on quick wit and audience participation, with a vague sense of magic in its unalterable formulae. The new drama depended on the dramatic clash of personalities and emotions enlivened by a thrillingly new linguistic experience. The impact on an audience of Marlowe's and later Shakespeare's 'mighty' lines, which still have a 'spellbinding' quality, must have been even greater on the first audiences whose experiences of vernacular poetry will have been severely limited.

Let us assume for the moment that Marlowe deliberately mixed these three types. The good and evil angel immediately become anachronisms, as though on another plane, irrelevant to the main discussion. Their exchanges with Faustus are indeed wooden; each inhabits his own world, and there can be no question of the angels seeming persuasive.<sup>40</sup> They do not take part in a dramatised interior monologue. Nothing they say corresponds to the real issues for Faustus, he never engages with them, they are no more than a buzzing in his ears, more concerned with their own 'accounting' of his actions which culminates, in the B Text, in their revelations of a conventional heaven and hell, from which Faustus is to be excluded or to which he is to be consigned. Even the use of a hell-mouth backcloth, which according to Henslowe's records seems to have been part of the Faustus scenery, could emphasize the dissociation between a consciously old-fashioned cosmology, represented by this morality play structure, and the new psychological conception of a hell that "hath no limits, nor is circumscribed in one self place."

Between these two levels is that of the folk play,<sup>41</sup> whose influence is difficult to determine precisely, because we have no reliable information about 'mummers' plays' before the 18th century. It is likely, however, that these folk plays, or 'dramatic ceremonies' as they are more properly called,<sup>42</sup> have roots deep in antiquity, and would have been widely

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<sup>40</sup> Compare, for instance, the use of the angel in the Brome *Abraham and Isaac* mystery play, or the personifications in *Everyman*.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Pettitt especially has drawn attention to this element in *Doctor Faustus*, i.e. in 'The Folk-Play in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, *Folklore XCI*, 1980, pp. 72-7

<sup>42</sup> Brody, *The English Mummers and their Plays*, p. 4

distributed throughout the British Isles in Marlowe's time.<sup>43</sup> The dramatic ceremony provides the model for a formula (both in words and action) allowing scope for free improvisation. For example, in the most widely-known ceremony, the 'Hero-Combat', the players are led in by a character who circumscribes a playing-space, usually a circle. He is followed by a protagonist (usually King George or Saint George) and an antagonist (the Turkish Knight or the Dragon). They fight, and the protagonist is killed, but subsequently revived by a much-travelled doctor with a miracle cure. The play ends with a 'quête' of miscellaneous characters who introduce themselves in formulaic ways, often with topical satirical references, and collect money, food or drink from the audience.<sup>44</sup>

Pettitt points out the similarities between this type of quête and the Pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins in *Faustus*. This can be seen in the example of the Netley Abbey play:

BEELZEBUB

In come I, little Tom Beelzebub,  
On me 'ed I carries me nob,  
In my 'and a drippin' pan —  
Don't you think I'm a funny old man?

POOR AND MEAN

In comes I, Poor and Mean,  
Hardly worthy to be seen.  
Christmas comes but once a year,  
When it comes it brings good cheer.  
Roast beef, plum pudding, mince pie,  
Who likes that any better and I? (*sic*)

GLUTTON

In comes I, Glutton,  
I can eat roast beef, bacon, pork or mutton.  
Although they call me poor and mean,  
My old sword will cut fat or lean.<sup>45</sup>

The Sins appear at first sight to be as irrelevant to the action as the quête appears to be in the combat between the hero and the antagonist, but just as Brody argues that in fact the quête contains the symbolic heart of the play as a fertility ritual,<sup>46</sup> so I shall suggest that the Seven Deadly Sins are a central element in *Faustus*' tragedy.

Anyone who has seen or taken part in these plays, even if they are no longer part of an unbroken 'authentic' tradition, will be aware both of the sacrosanct power of the formula, which by its very archaic and incongruous ceremonial resists change, and the vibrant life that

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<sup>43</sup> This at least would seem to be the evidence from the distribution of the Hero-Combat ceremony in England and Ireland, as given in Helm, *The English Mummers' Play*, pp. 27 & 31.

<sup>44</sup> Sample texts are given in Brody, *The English Mummers and their Plays* (Netley Abbey Mummers' Play) and Helm, *The English Mummers' Play* (various texts in Appendix 2)

<sup>45</sup> Brody, *The English Mummers and their Plays*, p. 134

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71



comes into them through the improvised 'clowning', taking off from the set text with a life of its own dependent on interaction with the audience or the other players. In the Hero-Combat the improvisation is usually around the doctor, who would be a man chosen for his ability to clown and 'play' an audience. That such men were part of Elizabethan theatre companies is well known. They could often expect to have a set place in a play for a comic 'routine' that they could freely improvise. Pettitt mentions "Kemps applauded merriments of the men of Gotham",<sup>47</sup> and we have evidence of conflicts later between these creative clowns and the playwrights like Shakespeare who were confident enough to do their own comedy writing and saw it as an integral part of the play.<sup>48</sup> It seems likely that Marlowe, who had no such pretensions, would have left these comic sections to be elaborated by the actors, merely issuing guidelines as to which formula they should follow; because it is quite clear that the comedy is not arbitrary, but follows a pattern of signficatory commentary on the main action of the play.

For example, when Wagner hires the clown<sup>49</sup> it is obviously an ironic comment on Faustus' pact with Mephistopheles; the clown would "give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton"<sup>50</sup> and think he had made a good bargain if he negotiated for it to be "well roasted, and a good sauce to it, if I pay so dear." Given the opportunity to turn himself into any shape, the clown has 'no more wit' than to ask to be turned into a flea, so that he can "tickle the pretty wenches' plackets"<sup>51</sup> When he notices something is wrong with the deal, he is held to it with a combination of reward (in a currency he is unfamiliar with) and punishment (when Wagner sets devils on him). The reader could be reminded of recent

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<sup>47</sup> Pettitt, 'Formulaic Dramaturgy in *Doctor Faustus*', p. 178. Kemp, a member of the Lord Chamberlain's company from 1589-93, may well have acted in *Doctor Faustus* when Alleyn took the lead. Kemp's proficiency in the Morris dance, which, with its use of the 'hobby horse' associated with the main figures of the Hero-Combat, is intimately bound up with the dramatic ceremony, is proved by his extraordinary dance to Norwich, described in *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder* (London: Camden Society, 1840).

<sup>48</sup> One thinks of Hamlet's exhortation to the clowns to "speak no more than is set down for them". It has been suggested that Kemp's dance to Norwich followed a disagreement with Shakespeare.

<sup>49</sup> The A Text followed by Bevington and Rasmussen identifies the clown with Robin. The identification is not made in B1, and appears to be conjectural, as is much of the clowning material (see below, p. 67). When doubling actors, it makes sense to have this clown played by the same actor as the vintner and horse-courser, and the two actors who play the scholars take the parts of Robin and Rafe. For this reason I depart from Bevington and Rasmussen and refer to the character in this scene simply as 'clown'.

<sup>50</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, I.iv.9f.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, I.iv.66f.

judgements on the effects of technology or the trap of capitalism.<sup>52</sup> He finally follows

Wagner with eyes directed downwards and in awe of Wagner's jargon:

*Wagner:* Villain, call me Master Wagner, and let thy left eye be diametrically fixed upon my right heel, with *quasi vestigiis nostris insistere*.

*Clown:* God forgive me, he speaks Dutch fustian. Well, I'll follow him. I'll serve him, that's flat.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, in the sub-plot in which Robin and Rafe, the stable-boys, steal a conjuring book, they can think of nothing better to do with it than satisfy their desire for unlimited supplies of free drink and getting off with the kitchen maid. When they steal a cup at the inn and use the book to try to escape from the vintner, no one can be more shocked than they are when the spell succeeds and Mephistopheles appears ('*per accidens*'?) and turns them into the outward form of their animal natures. The horse-courser scene too shows that it is not enough to get one's heart's desire; one also needs to know how to use it; the imagination can be a (winged) horse, but it can also become no more than a bale of straw if it has too much contact with the water of the unconscious.<sup>54</sup> It leaves the horse-courser furious, and his attempt to take revenge on Faustus prefigures the protagonist's final dismemberment. However, like the dismemberment of the folk play, it need not be final.

If these sections are indeed improvisation, it would explain why they are so different in style and tone from the psychological / poetic parts of the play, and why they are so different in the A and B versions. They would merely be the rather flat, verbatim record of one or more improvisations derived from real performance. This accords with the evidence adduced by Bevington and Rasmussen from a study of the composers' work that

two authors collaborated on the original version of the play, dividing their work roughly between serious and comic parts of the play and writing their stints on separate sheets of paper, and that revisions were then added in 1602 and quite possibly afterwards<sup>55</sup>

It would also account for what seem to be two alternative endings to III ii left standing in the A Text<sup>56</sup> and for what is generally accepted as the displacement of that scene in both the A and B versions.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See p. 174

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., I.iv.72-6

<sup>54</sup> The play, following the *Faustbook*, here uses an old legend of the 'biter bit' variety associated with magic, which was originally told about the Bohemian magician Žito (Ryecorn). See Zbrt, 'Zkázky o staročeském čaroději Žitovi', *Květy* 15, sv, 2, 1893, s. 340-344.

<sup>55</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 288. See also pp. 62-77.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 169

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 287f. and Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, (ed. Keefer), pp. lxii-lxxvii.



Apart from strengthening the commentary function of the comedy scenes, the effect of restoring their order is to allow what must be a common-sense doubling of parts, in which the pair of actors who play Valdez and Cornelius subsequently appear as Pope and Cardinal,



4. Faustus and Mephistopheles at the court of the Pope. The Good and Bad Angels can be seen in the foreground

Emperor and Knight, and finally as Duchess and Duke of Vanholt.<sup>58</sup> The comedy interludes provide just enough time for some rushed quick changes, particularly in Acts III and IV. Even with different costumes, however, the actors playing these

characters could hardly avoid being self-

referential. Theatrically, the effect would be to progressively undermine the vision of (male) power set out by Valdez and Cornelius in I ii, as the centres of spiritual and political authority are shown successively to be hollow and laughable, finally descending into low farce involving fruit.

The vision of power which is so effectively debunked during these scenes forms part of the basis of Faustus' bargain with Mephistopheles. His original Gnostic vision of his possibilities is untroubled by doubt, but in fact his search for knowledge is already contaminated with power-seeking and simple greed:

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,  
Resolve me of all ambiguities,  
Perform what desperate enterprise I will? <sup>59</sup>

His ambitions are for knowledge with particular ends in view, a series of gendered ambitions centred on domination and exploitative control. They reflect precisely the contemporary colonial preoccupations of the European powers, and Faustus' magic dreams are of the spirit of superior technology, in ships, armaments, and so on, that will make it possible to:

fly to India for gold,  
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl  
And search all corners of the new found world  
For pleasant fruits and princely delicates. <sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> This could answer Empson's expectations that Valdez and Cornelius should return: Empson, *Faustus and the Censor*, pp. 59f.

<sup>59</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, I.i.81ff.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., I.i.84-7



Espionage will be perfected to "know the secrets of all foreign kings" (recalling the plans of Trithemius), new weapons will be perfected: "stranger weapons for the brunt of war". The land is to be "walled with brass". The male figures of Valdez and Cornelius confirm these dreams of knowledge in alliance with male power, stimulating further ambitions of profits through colonial exploits: the argosies of Venice, in other words the riches of the East India trade in spices and silks, and the "golden fleece" of Spanish exploitation of America will be brought under Faustus' control. He will reduce the whole world of elements to slavery "as Indian moors obey their Spanish lords", will achieve greater political power than the German Emperor, and will even airlift armies:

And make a bridge through the moving air  
To pass the ocean with a band of men<sup>61</sup>

and conquer Africa:

I'll bind the hills that join the Afric shore  
And make that land continent to Spain,  
And both contributory to my crown.<sup>62</sup>

It is perhaps significant that bridging or diverting water (he plans to make the Rhine circle Wittenberg) play such an important part in his ambitions. Treasures are to be brought, too, from the ocean, or from the "massy entrails of the earth": the feminine, traditionally symbolic of the unconscious, is to be made harmless or subservient. Faustus' first projected use of Mephistopheles' power is to possess the "seignory of Emden". The full significance of this only emerges in Goethe's version of the story, but Emden is the capital of East Frisia, whose shelving seashore and mudflats which stretch to the chain of islands beyond offered the prospect of extensive drainage to win huge tracts of fertile land from the sea. This area "between the salt water and the sea sand" has always been the realm of the magic labour.<sup>63</sup>

Such dreams of power undoubtedly reflect the cultural climate of their time. With the notable exception of Elizabeth I herself, who felt she needed to apologise for her gender ("I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king"), political power was the preserve of men. In detailing the great political upheavals in Europe from the mid-15th to the early 18th centuries, Rosalind Miles points out that "behind

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., I.iii.107f.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., I.iii.109ff.



the vivid foreground activities of popes and kings, wars and discoveries, tyranny and defeat" women were relegated in general to the work which allowed life to go on, but had no power of the kind Faustus seeks.<sup>64</sup> The pursuit of knowledge itself was virtually impossible for most women. The universities and centres of learning, as well as the professions they supplied, were barred to them. Although some voices were raised, notably in Gnostic / Hermetic circles, for the equality of women and in favour of their education, such voices were few.<sup>65</sup> In showing the power Faustus desires and requests from Mephistopheles

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<sup>63</sup> One of the hero's labours for his love in the folk song known as 'Scarborough Fair' or 'Whittingham Fair' is to "find me an acre of land betwixt the salt water and the sea sand", Thomson, *Ballads of the North Countrie*, p. 416

<sup>64</sup> Miles, *The Women's History of the World*, p. 150

<sup>65</sup> Castiglione, in *The Courtier*, mentioned that "The virtues of the mind are as necessary to a woman as to a man" and we have seen that Ficino gave a place of eminence to a woman's voice in the dialogue *De Amore*. Agrippa, who believed in the basic equality of the sexes, even wrote a defence of women aimed at the misogynous attitude which underlay the Inquisition's witchcraft offensive; castigating contemporary society, he paints a gloomy enough picture:

"Allein, da ietzo alle Dinge verwirret sind durch das Ansehen, welches ihnen die Männer wider alles Recht und Billigkeit nehmen, so sind die Weiber alles ihres Vorzugs beraubt, und diese Gewaltthätigkeit zu entschuldigen, so sagt man, daß die Gesetze ihnen verbieten, sich denen Männern gleich zu achten, daß alle Privilegia, so ihnen von denen Alten zugestanden, durch die Gewohnheit, Gebrauch und Erziehung abgeschaffet seyend. So bald eine Tochter gebohren wird, so hält man sie im Hause eingesperrt, man ziehet sie auf in der Zärtlichkeit und Faulheit, gleich als wenn sie von Natur zu keinem wichtigen Amt geschickt wäre, man vergönnet ihr gleichsam nirgends weiter an zu denken, als an ihren Faden und Nadel; wenn sie nun zu ihren mannbaren Jahren kommen ist, so verheyrathet man sie, und untergiebt sie der Gewalt eines Mannes, welcher sie oftmahls als eine Sklavin traktieret, und läßt ihr nicht mehr Freyheit, als ihm etwa seine närrische Einfälle rathen. Sie mag immerhin brummen und sich beklagen, man hört sie nicht, ihre eigene Eltern, welche sie von Herzen geliebet haben, da si noch unter ihrer Aufsicht erzogen wurde, haben öfters nicht Credit genug, selbige beglückter zu machen. Sie sind alle gleich beraubt des Rechts sich öffentliche Bedienungen anzumassen, die verständigsten und klügsten haben nicht die Freyheit einen vor Gericht anzuklagen, sie sind von aller Jurisdiction verworfen, sie können nicht Schiedes-Leute seyn, auch keinen an Kindes-Statt annehmen, sie dürfen nichts mit Testaments- und Criminal-Sachen zu thun haben. Sie sind von dem Kirchen-Dienst abgesondert, obschon der H. Geist durch seinen Propheten Joel verspricht, nicht allein, daß die Alten werden Träume haben, die jungen Leute werden Gesichter sehen, sondern auch, daß die Töchter werden weissagen; [ ... ] Sind dennoch die Weiber mit Gewalt genöthigt worden, denen Männern zu weichen, welche über selbige siegen, gleich als wären sie ihnen durch Kriegs-Recht unterworfen, keinesweges durch göttliche Verordnung, nicht durch die Kraft einer geschickten Ursache, sondern durch die Gewohnheit, durch die Erziehung, durch das Looß, und durch die tyrannische Gelegenheit."

(But now that everything has been thrown into confusion by the respect that men have taken away from them against all sense of what is meet and right, women have been robbed of all their pre-eminence, and as an excuse for such violence it is said that the law forbids them to regard themselves as the equals of men, that all the privileges which our elders granted them have been abolished by custom, habit and upbringing. As soon as a daughter is born she is kept locked up in the house, she is brought up in tenderness and idleness as though she were unsuited by nature for any important position, she is not supposed to think of anything beyond her needle and thread; when she becomes nubile she is married off and delivered into the domination of a man who often treats her as a slave and allows her no more freedom than his foolish fancies suggest to him. Though she may moan and complain, she is not heard, and her own parents, who loved her dearly when she was under their supervision, often themselves lack the credit to increase her happiness. They are all equally denied the right to aspire to public service, the most sensible and cleverest are not at liberty to bring a case against anyone at law, they are excluded from all jurisdiction, they cannot act as arbitrators, cannot be children's governors, are not allowed to have anything to do with wills or criminal cases. They are disbarred from church offices, although the Holy Ghost spoke through the prophet Joel saying not only that old people shall dream dreams and young people see visions but that the daughters of men shall prophesy too, [ ... ] But

Marlowe is reflecting accurately the society around him, but in his systematic debunking and demolition of that power in the second half of the play he is in fact thoroughly undermining the basis and legitimacy of such ambitions.

Faustus is given the means to achieve power through the pact with Mephistopheles. The spirit Mercurius, the unconscious, imagination, demands a price in exchange. All Faustus' questions are answered — about hell, how to conjure spirits, about all the plants in the world, and doubtless much more<sup>66</sup> — except one: who made the world?: if Mephistopheles revealed Faustus' own true divine creative place in the cosmos, his power would be ended. Instead he offers command of the material, the world of projections, as though it were absolutely autonomous, and the extension of his own body, its limbs and senses, up to the extent of his imagination. He transforms Faustus, in other words, into the engineer, capable of achieving total, exploitative power over the material world. The play is full of the dreams of a technology that has become commonplace in our 20th/21st century world, like the conjuring of the exact, speaking, moving forms of the dead on video, or the transport of fresh foods halfway round the globe. But there are boundaries, and dangers, and a price, and because Mercurius is a trickster spirit, the price and the reward may not be what they seem.

The pact, which must be signed in blood in token of its physical reality, specifies a time limit of 24 years. This, appropriately, is Faustus' original idea. It symbolises the 24 hours of the day, and thus time in general, subordinate to the laws of entropy, which operate on

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still women are compelled by force to give way to men who triumph over them as though they had been subjugated by martial law, not indeed by divine ordinance, not through the power of a fitting reason, but through custom, through upbringing, through fate, and through tyrannous occasion.) (Agrippa, *Von dem Vorzug und der Fürtrefflichkeit des weiblichen Geschlechts vor dem männlichen*, pp. 52f — my translation)

Even given a certain degree of enlightenment, the situation as regards women's education is summed up by Margaret King: "Juan Luis Vives's *De institutione feminae christianae* (1529), which circulated in forty editions and was translated into Spanish, English, Dutch, French, German, and Italian, became the leading sixteenth-century work on the education of women, and it epitomizes the advice offered on the subject. No defects in women's minds stood in the way of their achieving wisdom, Vives found. At the same time they had to be carefully guarded from improprieties, for the main aim of their education was honesty and chastity. This paradoxical advice typifies the male humanist position on the issue of female education, insists that women should be taught, but warns that they should not be taught too much. Scripture, good manners and simple moral tracts were appropriate; science, philosophy and rhetoric were not." (King, *The Woman of the Renaissance*, p. 237).

<sup>66</sup> Mephistopheles, when asked to provide Faustus with a book containing all knowledge, produces a text with the indeterminate ambivalence of an artifact that might be the infinite storage capacity of a proto-CD-Rom or the infinite generative power of creative language. One is reminded of Peter Greenaway's film *Prospero's Books*.



the basis that time has an arrow which only points one way. The pact also specifies that Faustus must give up his soul. This, in the form of the 'anima', is the feminine side of his psyche. He will see her again when he realises the pointlessness of male power near the end of the play in the form of Helen, who is the Gnostic Helen of Simon Magus, the 'first thought of God', the Ennoia, principle of wisdom, who has become degraded into prostitution with the material; only now Faustus has lost the opportunity to redeem her. As an anima projection she appears magical and numinous, 'shining' in fact, as though she were a god, but now of course within the power of Mephistopheles. Like the animus / anima syzygy, writes Jung:

Together they form a divine pair, one of whom, in accordance with his Logos nature, is characterised by *pneuma* and *nous*, rather like Hermes with his shifting hues, while the other, in accordance with her Eros nature, wears the features of Aphrodite, Helen (Selene), Persephone, and Hecate. Both of them are unconscious powers, "gods" in fact, as the ancient world quite rightly conceived them to be.<sup>67</sup>

As a vision of the anima projection, we might expect this vision of Helen to carry a particular poetic charge, and this is in fact the case, enshrined as it is in the play's most famous lines:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.  
Her lips suck forth my soul<sup>68</sup>

and the alchemical image "all is dross that is not Helena" becomes entirely appropriate. It has also been pointed out by several commentators that the image of Helen has been destabilised as to gender, that she is compared with "flaming Jupiter"<sup>69</sup> and the "monarch of the sky".<sup>70</sup> These destabilisations fit into a pattern observable throughout the play, where, as the conscious attitude tends more and more to an extreme, the unconscious compensates and provides an image tending to wholeness.

If this vision of Helen emerges at the point in the play where we should expect the tragic climax, leading to the dénouement of Faustus' final soliloquy, the central, pivotal position is taken by the Pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins. Various commentators have pointed out the

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<sup>67</sup> Jung, *Collected Works* 9 (ii), p.21.

<sup>68</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, V.i.91-4

<sup>69</sup> In connection with Semele's fate, which is that of Faustus, Norman O Brown notes: "Semele asked for the full presence of her divine lover, and received the thunderbolt. *Hiroshima, mon amour*. Save us from the literal fire. The literal-minded, the idolaters, receive the literal fire." (*Love's Body*, p. 182)

<sup>70</sup> e.g. D.J. Palmer, 'Magic and Poetry in *Doctor Faustus*', Jump (ed.) *Marlowe: Doctor Faustus: A Casebook*, p. 197f.

connection between the Sins and 'flaws' in Faustus, in particular pride,<sup>71</sup> and gluttony.<sup>72</sup> They have also noted the way in which these characteristics are integrated into the play's imagery (glutted with conceit etc.). Bevington and Rasmussen note that "orthodox critics are able to illustrate abundantly the link between Faustus and all of the Deadly Sins".<sup>73</sup> Close analysis of the early part of the play reveals that the Seven Sins regularly resonate with words, phrases and images from the text, in the way that the sympathetic strings of an instrument like a sitar begin to vibrate when the frequency of the melody string corresponds with its note or one of its harmonics. In my own production of the play, this was the logic behind having the sins present throughout the first half of the play, though caged until their formal introduction in the Pageant. Not only would this conform with the folk play format we have discussed, there is even a clue that something similar may have been intended originally, namely the puzzling "*Stipendium*, etc." that follows the line where Faustus reads "*Stipendium peccati mors est. Ha!*"<sup>74</sup> during his review of his options. Might that not suggest an echo, *sotto voce*, from the assembled but still passive sins? The sins, then, would represent the embodiment of instinctual Desire, the unconscious drives behind Faustus' manipulation of the material world, a striking prefiguration of the Freudian 'id'. They are at the beck and call of Mephistopheles, as the projection of the Shadow; and as long as they remain 'caged' by the conventional structures and hierarchies of Christian society and religion they are relatively harmless, like zoo or circus animals. First introduced by Mephistopheles as a 'show' — "somewhat to delight his mind"<sup>75</sup> — they bring Faustus crowns and robes "to show what magic can perform". In a stringent postmodern reading L. L. James also stresses the centrality of such 'plays', noting:

What is properly revealed in *Faustus*, however, is that the subject is duped *by* his own desire (as the desire of the Other); by the chimerical objects of fantasy, those objects *causing* Faustus' desire and at the same time — and this is the indispensable paradox — *posed retrospectively* by his desire.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> e.g. Smith & Maxwell

<sup>72</sup> e.g. Levin, Barber & Stock

<sup>73</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, p.19

<sup>74</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, I.i.39f.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., II.i.82

<sup>76</sup> James, 'The Dramatic Effects of the Play-Within-A-Play in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus', p. 30.



Once formally released by Mephistopheles and Lucifer they transmogrify into the devils that will tear Faustus to pieces. Lacking either confinement from without or the control of the integrated psyche within, they indeed, as James says, reveal themselves as "an incomplete



5. Faustus crowned by the Seven Deadly Sins

tropic gesture which exhausts itself in the general economy of desire and intertextual resonance."<sup>77</sup> As a description of hell this would be hard to improve on. It is at the point when he sees the vision of his 'lost' soul, that Faustus, threatened by Mephistopheles that he "will in piecemeal tear thy flesh",<sup>78</sup> tells him to torture the old man, who represents the innocence Faustus has also lost.<sup>79</sup>

A similar moment of degradation and despair marks the cathartic final soliloquy with its mingled images of consuming, vomiting, and birth. To the relentless beat of passing time Faustus finds his attempt to transcend limited by time and the disjunction of Eros. Martin Versfeld, in a fascinating but seldom-discussed article, though he approaches Faustus' decision to take up magic from the perspective of Augustinian theology and philosophy, draws far more profound conclusions than many literary critics. Versfeld argues that from the moment he takes leave of "*on kai me on*" (being or not being) Faustus is also abandoning the "principle of identity, A is A, God is God, being is being and not non-being, this pencil is this pencil, Helen is Helen, and a dead Helen is not a live Helen".<sup>80</sup> But tapping the power of the imagination and allowing it primacy involves other consequences, according to Versfeld, some of which we have observed. His knowledge of things, outside their previous hierarchical order, becomes simply a means to facilitate domination over them. "Exploitation commences when, the image being substituted for the original, the *amor*

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 31

<sup>78</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, V. i.69

<sup>79</sup> One is reminded of the moment of O'Brien's success in George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, when Winston, with the integrity of his mind shattered, reacts to the ultimate threat of physical violence with the cry : : "Do it to Julia! Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia! I don't care what you do to her! Tear her face off, strip her to the bones! Not me! Julia! Not me!" (George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 230)



*concupiscentiae* having supplanted the *amor Dei*, men see nothing in things but a means to enhance their own egos."<sup>81</sup> The first fault Versfeld identifies is Faustus' assumption that his soul is his own, and then, having appropriated it as a thing subject to his ego, to surrender the soul, which Versfeld characterises as "the power to give his own being",<sup>82</sup> which we could also describe as the true power of Eros. The result of this process, Versfeld concludes, is the exploitation of things, the misappropriation of women, and a paradoxical descent into the material:

He must misappropriate realities by reducing them to bodies, as Hobbes was to do in the grand manner. Magic as appropriation is now seen as a kind of fornication with being.<sup>83</sup>

By trying to control the world he is controlled by it. It is an action which finds its nemesis in time, which Faustus has been unable to overcome.<sup>84</sup> Time is the seal on the reality of things.

For Versfeld the lesson is clear: pride and desperation flow from the will to reject God's order and the self-indulgence of questioning the principle of identity underlying reality in time. But is that where Marlowe leaves it? As Faustus faces the shattering midnight in which the celestial unconscious, suffused with an angry sunset glow like Christ's blood, will not receive him back, and the material of the earth will not "gape" to receive him, he prays that his consciousness might disappear into water-drops and be reborn in the death of the constant exchange between above and below that he has failed to span. At the final moment, his cry of "Ah Mephistopheles" seems strangely welcoming of the Mercurial spirit, suggesting that not everything is ended.<sup>85</sup> The audience too, if they catch the echo of the Hero-Combat play, may expect that the final word has not yet been spoken, and the gesture of dismemberment, even in the Christian interpretation, does not necessarily signify defeat. The glass slipper is left to be tried on again.<sup>86</sup>

The glass slipper, of course, is the play itself, and the words and actions constantly repeated, but never identically, defy entropy. As an enchanted glass it is both reality and

<sup>80</sup> Versfeld, 'Some Remarks on Marlowe's *Faustus*', *English Studies in Africa* 1, 1958, p.137

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140

<sup>84</sup> Versfeld here independently reaches the same conclusion as Eliade, who traces the transition from the alchemical imagination, dependent on "concealing" its self-awareness about Time, to modern man who is "essentially, and sometimes even uniquely, a temporal being" (Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, p.175)

<sup>85</sup> See Empson's discussion of this ending in *Faustus and the Censor*, p. 162.

<sup>86</sup> Greenblatt, in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, makes the mistake of seeing the 'glass slipper' as an end in itself.



something else — the imagination — which will link it in alchemical redemption with the subject, as Helen's kiss could make Faustus immortal. The philosopher's stone is hidden in the words, which Faustus himself has not yet found, leaving him separated from his soul and defeated by time.

The Gnostic seeker, attempting to project his creativity into the real, makes the mistake of acceding to a one-sided projection which abandons his feminine, erotic nature to the brothel of the material. Though he gains knowledge, enabling him to manipulate reality through a mastery of causality, his mastery proves illusory because it is bounded by time and, subject to his still unconscious and unintegrated Shadow, he releases part of his psyche to tear him into pieces. His fall is not the fall of Icarus, or the punishment mediated by Peter on Simon Magus, but Agrippa's fall of the soul no longer joined to the other poles of the mind. The search to reintegrate the vision of the soul at the epistemological junction between unconfined imagination and the law-governed 'real', a boundary marked by time, will be shown to be the concern of four major 'postcolonial' writers.



## Chapter Three

### Ariel Magic: Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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Numerous studies have coupled Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, particularly in their treatment of magic and the practitioner of magic, but also, significantly, in the relationship between the magician and a spirit.<sup>1</sup> It is worth looking at *The Tempest* in detail in the light of the discussions in the previous chapters; the figure of Ariel has received much less comment than has Mephistopheles, but will be found to have interesting links within the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition as well as to the works to be discussed later.

Whereas the Faust story with its obscure origins and lasting resonance can uncontroversially be termed a myth, attempts to categorize Shakespeare's *The Tempest* have not reached such a clear resolution. If myth is usually regarded as a story about gods, tending to use their figures to exemplify and explain aspects of the world or human conduct,<sup>2</sup> the effect will be to give the story a kind of supernatural or transcendent sanction, as a metaphor of some greater or more universal process. The psychological reality of an Oedipus complex is dignified by an association with the myth, and the myth in turn is confirmed by it. This could justifiably lead to the common conclusion that myth should be dismissed as a legitimization of existing power structures. Alternatively a more constructivist argument would run that the ability to narrate a myth is an important contribution to conceptualizing, and thus creating, a world to live in, and the richer the world, the richer the life. Northrop Frye states that "the union of ritual and dream in a form of verbal communication is myth",<sup>3</sup> thus allowing for contributions towards an understanding of a work of literature from anthropology and psychology, but his discussion then suffers from

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. E. M. Butler, *The Myth of the Magus*, Jeffrey Hart, 'Prospero and Faustus', Frances Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays*, David Young, 'Where the bee sucks', Richard Marienstras, *New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World*, Andreas Höfele, 'Wissen und Macht'.

<sup>2</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 64

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 106

seeing in ritual only the ideal arrangements of plot and in psychology only the relations between desire and reality.<sup>4</sup> Frye uses the term 'romance' for *The Tempest* rather than myth: "Romance peoples the world with fantastic, normally invisible personalities or powers: angels, demons, fairies, ghosts, enchanted animals, elemental spirits...",<sup>5</sup> although he later allows that *The Tempest* conveys a "feeling of converging significance"<sup>6</sup> around which archetypes resembling myths are constellated. This begs the question of the purpose to which such figures are put.

What might lie behind the literary work is the subject of A.D.Nuttall's investigation in *Two Concepts of Allegory*, in which he poses the question whether *The Tempest* is merely 'perceptual imagery' or whether it should be seen as allegory, taking the meaning of allegory not as 'frigid personification' but as 'living symbolism'. His conclusion is that "The suggestiveness of *The Tempest* is metaphysical in tendency",<sup>7</sup> although he adds the caveat for those who seek to define the allegory as a code: "Their claims to have found the exclusive allegorical interpretation may be left to their foolish internecine strife, but their noses told them that the smell of metaphysics was in the air."<sup>8</sup> Anne Barton has called *The Tempest* 'a gigantic metaphor', which deals, according to Peter Brook, with 'the whole condition of man'<sup>9</sup> Jan Kott recognizes that "Shakespeare's dramas are constructed not on the principle of unity of action, but on the principle of analogy".<sup>10</sup>

So metonymy, the relations between a fictitious imaginative construct and a perception of the 'real', is a central concern in discussing *The Tempest*, as it is in *Doctor Faustus*.<sup>11</sup> The play begins with an almost naturalistic storm and shipwreck.<sup>12</sup> Yet no sooner have the audience experienced the full force of the elements reducing order to chaos, the ship splitting

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<sup>4</sup> Although Frye reveals a considerable knowledge of Jung's works, he fails to observe that Jung moves beyond the original Freudian frame of reference. Similarly Kermode refers dismissively to the "psychic residua of the consulting room" (Introduction to the Arden Shakespeare *The Tempest*, lxxxiii)

<sup>5</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> A.D.Nuttall, *Two Concepts of Allegory*, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 160

<sup>9</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*

<sup>10</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, p. 245

<sup>11</sup> Here and throughout this study I am using 'metonymy' to cover a wide range of metaphorical and resonant resources of language.

<sup>12</sup> Kermode notes the convincing description of measures to be taken in a storm: Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (ed. Kermode), pp. 3f.



and the terror of the sailors, than they are informed that in fact 'no harm' has been done, and the whole thing has been a complex illusion of Prospero's magic. As Gonzalo is prompted to say later:

Whether this be  
Or be not, I'll not swear.<sup>13</sup>

and indeed this is the main quality of Prospero's island. It can be compared to the 'seigniorship of Emden', the potential land subject to reclamation which Faustus claims;<sup>14</sup> the island is a place apparently real (with a suggested location in the Mediterranean) but intimately associated with contemporary travellers' tales about the New World, Asia and Africa.<sup>15</sup> References to 'Argier', Tunis and Naples seem entirely realistic, but are continually relativized throughout the play, for instance by mention of Bermuda,<sup>16</sup> hyperbole about the distances involved ("ten leagues beyond man's life"),<sup>17</sup> or the fact that no other people have visited the island since Prospero and Miranda's arrival there. In addition to this, the island's geography is paradoxical. It is small enough for a two-hour search to convince the court party that it is an island and that there are no other survivors, but large enough to make them lose themselves and each other and prevent them from finding the ship. It has a varied topography including fens and forests, and is both hot enough to justify the belief there might be lions, and cold enough to have frosts and make large quantities of fuel necessary.

These contradictions might suggest a locus for the Utopian imagination, a no-place in the tradition of More, and yet Utopias are traditionally as realistic and consistent within themselves as possible. The chief objection to seeing Prospero's island as a Utopian fantasy is that it is *not* an ideal place. No ideal society is described, Caliban is not Montaigne's 'noble savage', and Gonzalo's plans for an ideal 'plantation' are justly ridiculed for their illogicality. More significantly, the island alters radically according to who is perceiving it, as becomes clear in the exchange between members of the court party in II.i.34-65. For

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<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (ed. Kermode), V.i.123. All references are to this edition.

<sup>14</sup> See p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> See in particular Marienstras, *New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World*, Ch. 7. Marienstras finds in the travel literature itself "a kind of synthesis or co-existence between the real and the imaginary, truth and fantasy, literal reality and metaphor" (p. 161). Karen Flagstad in her dissertation 'Such Stuff as Dreams are Made on' (1979) also investigates these sources and parallels in detail (pp. 31-63). Marienstras comments on the storm (p. 170): "We are therefore bound to accept it as both real and illusion and, on top of that, as real even while it is illusory."

<sup>16</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest* I.ii.229

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., II.i.242

Adrian and Gonzalo, the naive and sentimental optimists, it is, though "uninhabitable, and almost inaccessible",<sup>18</sup> a place with good air, green grass and everything needed to live. Even the salt water has redemptive powers on their clothes. For Sebastian and Antonio, the cynical and witty pragmatists, the grass is withered and the air reeks of stagnant bog. These descriptions bear all the hallmarks of projection.<sup>19</sup>

If this is the case the similarities noted above between *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest*<sup>20</sup> need not be surprising. Shakespeare is portraying a Magus in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition for whom magic in its various aspects holds out the promise of interaction with and manipulation of the material world through the agency of projections of the psyche in the form of spirits.<sup>21</sup> How exactly Prospero practises his magic is not made clear, but the importance of knowledge obtained through books is stressed at various junctures. Prospero was able, through Gonzalo's help, to bring to the island "volumes that I prize above my dukedom".<sup>22</sup> Caliban urges Stephano and Trinculo:

First to possess his books; for without them  
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not  
One spirit to command<sup>23</sup>

and in Prospero's abjuration of magic he promises:

And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book.<sup>24</sup>

The island, an area of consciousness surrounded by the unconscious, is split off from the mainland; access to it for Prospero has been obtained by reason of adversity (through being exiled) and after a dangerous voyage. Also, with Prospero's cell at its centre, it represents

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., II.i.36

<sup>19</sup> Flagstad notes ('Such Stuff as Dreams are Made on', p. 111): "Prospero's all-purpose working word is of course 'project', and the word is doubly fitting. To project is to experiment in alchemy, that Hermetic science *par excellence*; it is also to traject, to externalize. And in the latter sense, Prospero projects his majestic vision not only in the betrothal masque but in the often masque-like scenario of the play entire."

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Hart asserts: Parallels between *Faustus* and *The Tempest* are plentiful. 'Faustus' and 'Prospero' are synonyms, both meaning fortunate or well-omened." (Hart, 'Prospero and Faustus', *Boston University Studies in English*, 11/4, 1956/57, p. 201. Marienstras even lists the similarities in two appendices.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Pagel writes: The main objects of the Magus are the transmutation of objects, transfer of power, action at a distance and prediction." The Magus is superior to Nature, because he is 'spiritualischer Meister', and he uses the power of that spirit to achieve his ends through Nature. "It is human 'Scientia' and not the stars which are here at work, although the Magus 'learns' from the star and is sent by it." (Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, p. 64)

<sup>22</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest* I.ii.67f.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., III.ii.90-93

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., V.i.56f.



the hermetic vessel where his 'project', an alchemical process, takes place.<sup>25</sup> It is by turns a 'temenos', or sacred place, and a labyrinth in which it is possible to become lost within an internal logic that leads to a central revelation.

Prospero's exile is interesting: it resulted from his decision to divide his functions, concentrating solely on his speculative, intellectual pursuits while delegating political power to his brother, thus introducing a disjunction with the 'real', material world. In neglecting the practical concerns of politics and family he becomes at least partially responsible for his own overthrow.<sup>26</sup> His exile on the island becomes an extension of his alienation from the 'real', coming as it does after a hazardous 'night sea journey' suggesting the immeasurable distance between the 'real' world and the interior world. The island and the cell become an



6. Caliban emerging from the shell in the RSC production of *The Tempest*, 1998

image of the centre of a circuit of the mind, like the spiral of a tempestuous weather-system or galaxy, or a sea-shell, cochlea-shaped, giving access to the interior music of the sea.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from his books, Prospero's only companion on his voyage to the island is his daughter, a girl of three, a potential but as yet undeveloped aspect of the feminine. Their arrival strangely mirrors another earlier one — that of the witch Sycorax, who was also exiled 'with child': her son

<sup>25</sup> The suggestion that *The Tempest* can be understood in alchemical terms arose in my case spontaneously during the course of rehearsals. Suggestions along these lines are, however, frequent among commentators. The most thorough alchemical and Jungian reading is Noel Cobb's *Prospero's Island* (1984), which also establishes connections with Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (1612); it is a valuable study, to which I am indebted in the following discussion. In *The Alchemist*, Jonson, although his aim appears to be satirical, shows a thorough working knowledge of alchemical terms. There is no reason to suppose that Shakespeare, who made widespread use of the imagery of 'heavenly alchemy', would have been unaware of currents of Gnostic / Hermetic thought. Frances Yates has indicated connections between *The Tempest* and the courts of Heidelberg and Prague, where the Gnostic / Hermetic revival was strongest and around which the Rosicrucian furore was to be centred.

<sup>26</sup> Cobb's discussion of Prospero's psychological make-up in terms of Jung's theory of types is worth noting here. (Cobb, *Prospero's Island*, pp. 37-48) In this context Cobb also agrees with Frances Yates in seeing certain parallels between the figure of Prospero and the contemporary English Magus John Dee.

<sup>27</sup> A shape like this formed the centrepiece of our production of *The Tempest* in 1980. A more realistic-looking sea-shell was used similarly in the RSC production in 1998, directed by Adrian Noble.



Caliban. This correspondence is striking enough. Besides their magic powers and their children, male and female, they both have access to the spirit Ariel. But while Sycorax has been exiled for "mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible to enter human hearing"<sup>28</sup> and has subjected Ariel to "earthy and abhorred commands",<sup>29</sup> which suggests extreme and uninhibited sexuality, involving, so Prospero claims, the Devil himself as a sexual partner, Prospero's disturbed relationship with the feminine is brought out by his almost total failure to mention his wife, apart from a significantly embarrassing reference:

Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and  
She said thou wast my daughter.<sup>30</sup>

So Sycorax, who lacks a husband, and Prospero, without his wife, are locked into a symbiotic twinship or marriage in which Prospero's one-sided accentuation of the intellect is paralleled by Sycorax's diseased parodic roundness; for though she has grown into a hoop, the circular shape of the island and the cell, it is not a circle of completeness; she has grown like that "with age and envy",<sup>31</sup> the perversions of time and material desire. The intimacy of this relationship between Prospero and Sycorax suggests a subtle set of links between the other main characters on the island. Caliban, the son of Sycorax, besides being the original heir to the island, is brother and twin to Miranda. Indeed the text suggests as much:

I have used thee,  
Filth as thou art, with human care; and lodg'd thee  
In mine own cell, ...<sup>32</sup>

but this intimacy was ended by Prospero when the perversion of desire in Sycorax threatened to recur:

... till thou didst seek to violate  
The honour of my child.

There is a long history of speculation about the figure of Caliban, termed by Zdeněk Stříbrný "arguably the most original and also the most puzzling and provocative character of

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<sup>28</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.ii.264f.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., I.ii. 273

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., I.ii.56f.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., I.ii. 258

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., I.ii.347ff. David Young inclines to the view that Caliban first emerges from Prospero's cell, implying that he is "an intractable portion of his imagination" (Young, 'Where the Bee Sucks: A Triangular Study of *Doctor Faustus*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Tempest*, in Kay & Jacobs (eds.), *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, pp. 162f.) Our 1980 production and Adrian Noble's 1998 production both had Caliban emerging from the shell.



the whole play".<sup>33</sup> In the 'Names of the Actors' he is called "a salvage and deformed slave" and each of the words has prompted genealogies of speculation. As a savage, he can be seen in relation to the 'parodic' Faustian Elizabethan expansion of control over the external globe and contemporary discourse about the inhabitants of the 'New World', which revolved around the polarities of 'brute beast' and 'noble savage'. Shakespeare used Montaigne's essay about cannibals (whose name derived from the Carib people inhabiting areas of the Caribbean) and apparently employed a simple anagram to arrive at the name Caliban. Stephen Orgel also points out that Shakespeare would probably have known Hariot's account of the Virginia expedition which was published with illustrations engraved by Theodore De Bry from John White's watercolours, designed to emphasize the similarity between the New World savages and the ancient inhabitants of Britain.<sup>34</sup> Marienstras, Kermode and Frye all place Caliban in a tradition which relates him to writing about the forest and the 'green world', thus bringing him into proximity with the 'Wodwo' or wild man of the woods. In the twentieth century the play, and particularly Caliban, have proved fertile ground for interpretations based on a colonial or postcolonial analysis. In this context one might particularly mention Aimé Césaire with *Une Tempête*, stressing Prospero's tyranny, or the phenomenon of 'Arielism' in Latin America begun by the Uruguayan Enrique Rodó in his essay 'Ariel' (1900), in which the freshness and gracefulness of spirit triumph over irrationality and barbarism in the form of Caliban's sensuality and crudeness, in a personification of the bullying US.<sup>35</sup> Marina Warner's far-reaching and illuminating discussion of cannibals and other monsters relates them to the projections of the unconscious and the bugbears of our own day.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps most influential in Anglophone postcolonial discourse has been George Lamming's essay 'A Monster, A Child, A Slave',<sup>37</sup> in which a perceptive and sensitive analysis of Caliban and his relations with Prospero and Miranda is unfortunately marred by a simplistic view of Ariel as the Uncle Tom lackey and policeman of

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<sup>33</sup> Střřbrný, 'The New World in Shakespeare's *Tempest*', *Litteraria Pragensia*, 2/3, 1992, p. 51

<sup>34</sup> Orgel, 'Shakespeare and the Cannibals', in Garber (ed.), *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce*, pp.42ff.

<sup>35</sup> See Střřbrný, 'The New World in Shakespeare's *Tempest*' and Vaughan & Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban*.

<sup>36</sup> Warner, *Managing Monsters*, in particular pp. 65-79. For a related and scrupulous account of the European fascination with cannibalism, and how fact is often obscured by fancy, see Barker, Hulme and Iversen (eds), *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, in particular the introduction by Peter Hulme, pp. 1-38.

<sup>37</sup> Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, pp. 95-117

the colonial oppressor. That these varying interpretations are so persuasive and have been so productive is a measure of the play's metonymic potential: the figures have constituted themselves as tropes in remote time and space out of 'insubstantial' imagination and 'thin air'.

In all of this Shakespeare is careful to maintain a balance in his portrayal of Caliban. He is neither demonized nor idealized. No suggestion is made in the play that he is a cannibal. Although he curses Prospero he has reason to curse, having been dispossessed and enslaved, and his plans to rebel and to murder Prospero are contingent upon his attempts to liberate himself. All the commentators since Coleridge have pointed out the tenderness and poetry of Caliban's lines, and his intimate relationship with the natural environment is of a different order from Prospero's. He is, however, not portrayed as an ideal. The brutality of the planned murder, the ease with which he can be seduced to follow Trinculo and Stephano, exchanging one form of slavery for another, or his attempted rape of Miranda do not belong to a conception of a primitive Utopia.

Caliban, in other words, exists within material nature and is peculiarly subject to the senses and the promptings, blandishments and limitations of material reality. He feels the power of music, but is subject to Prospero's will in the manifestation of physical torment and 'pinchings', and is styed in hard rock. To that extent, as well as in his slavery to Prospero, or later to alcohol, he is also a slave to his own passions. He is amoral rather than immoral; he feels no regret for attempting to rape Miranda, seeing in the action no reason for shame. If we are right above in seeing an alchemical / psychological dimension in the play, Caliban fulfils many of the functions of the *prima materia*, the primary substance to be transformed by the alchemical process. This in no way contradicts the close relationships we have remarked on. The alchemist is involved in the transmutation of his own psyche as projected in a spiritual and material cosmos while he is engaged in the *opus*. Thus the commentators are quite justified in remarking on how Caliban in some ways becomes the scapegoat carrying negative qualities projected on him by Prospero. This will further reinforce our conjecture that Caliban should first emerge from Prospero's cell, the centre of consciousness, to which he will finally return when Prospero has delegated to Alonso the responsibility for Stephano and Trinculo but is forced to admit:



This thing of darkness I

Acknowledge mine.<sup>38</sup>

Prospero's alienation from Caliban, which results in him almost invariably substituting some sort of insult for his name, mirrors his alienation from the natural world. (It is symptomatic that he seems to be involved in some sort of non-renewable logging operation.) The alchemical work that is required of him, though it involves far more than Caliban, must measure its success according to its effect on Caliban as a representative of his dealings with material nature and desire. In Gnostic / Hermetic terms it is worth comparing the deformed nature of Caliban with the Gnostic tradition of the material universe as an abortion produced by an unconscious demiurge. Flagstad compares the projection aspect of Caliban with Frankenstein's monster, concluding that "Caliban's crude scheme of revenge against Prospero mirrors — unmistakably — Prospero's own machinations in the way of revenge. Caliban mirrors Prospero's own self-righteous, vengeful bent."<sup>39</sup> The words resonate with the Old Testament relationship between Yahweh and his Chosen People.

In order to begin the alchemical *opus*, besides the *prima materia*, the spirit Mercurius is needed. In the previous chapter it was shown how Faustus conjured up Mephistopheles in order to exercise power over the material world; Prospero releases Ariel in a comparable process from an imprisonment caused by desire for the material. Sycorax confined Ariel within a cloven pine because he / she was

...a spirit too delicate  
To act her earthy and abhorr'd commands,  
Refusing her grand hests,...<sup>40</sup>

This figure of Ariel is every bit as puzzling and fascinating as Caliban, yet has been given far less attention by commentators.

Ariel's emergence from a tree, which Prospero is able to engineer by means of the knowledge he has gained from the 'secret studies' made from his books, in other words occult philosophy in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition, recalls the emergence of Melusina from the tree of knowledge in the 15th century Ripley Scroll, a work circulating widely in Elizabethan times. It may also be connected to the famous paradox, the Enigma of Bologna,

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<sup>38</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, V.i.275f. Corfield notes how close Caliban's speech is to Prospero's, and points out that Caliban's initial curses on Prospero rebound immediately in the same kind on himself. Corfield, 'Why Does Prospero Abjure His "Rough Magic"?', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36 (1985), pp. 31-48

<sup>39</sup> Flagstad, *Such Stuff as Dreams are Made on*, p. 158

which alchemists including Michael Maier believed to be an alchemical mystery. The enigma takes the form of an epitaph, said to have been found in Bologna:

Aelia Laelia Crispis, nec mulier, nec androgyna, nec puella, nec iuvenis, nec anus, nec casta, nec meretrix, nec pudica, sed omnia.

(Aelia Laelia Crispis, neither woman nor man, nor androgynous, nor girl, nor boy, nor old woman, nor chaste, nor whore, nor virtuous, but all - my translation)

which is discussed by Jung at some length.<sup>41</sup> Jung dismisses the enigma itself with its simultaneous assertion of everything and nothing as nonsense, but shows how it became a "flypaper for every conceivable projection that buzzed in the human mind." Among the commentators on the mystery was a doctor and contemporary of Shakespeare's, Ulysses Aldrovandus (1522-1605), who wrote: "I maintain that Aelia Laelia Crispis was one of the Hamadryads [...] who was tied to an oak in the neighbourhood of the city of Bologna, or shut up inside it."<sup>42</sup> Jung comments that in this interpretation the wood-nymph shut up in an oak sacred to Juno could be seen as an Anima projection: "Mythologically, nymphs, dryads etc. are nature- and tree-numina, but psychologically they are anima projections, so far as masculine statements are concerned." Aldrovandus goes on to associate the tree with one "planted as it were in a heavenly garden, where sun and moon are spread out like two flowers,"<sup>43</sup> which might be the Tree of Life or the Tree of Knowledge. This is the same tree as that in the Ripley Scroll, and the Melusina emerging from it is a mermaid with a snake's tail. The Ripley Scroll also shows the *prima materia* as a dragon transformed into a toad on the lowest level beneath the tree.<sup>44</sup> Jung has more to reveal about this 'Melusina'<sup>45</sup> in an essay on Paracelsus,<sup>46</sup> which shows it to have other bearings on *The Tempest*. Paracelsus writes in his treatise *De Vita Longa*:

Atque ad hunc modum abiit e nymphidica natura intervenientibus Scaiolis in aliam transmutationem permansura Melosyne, si difficilis ille Adech annuisset, qui utrunque

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<sup>40</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.ii.272ff.

<sup>41</sup> Jung, *Collected Works* 14, pp. 56-88

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 68

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 69

<sup>44</sup> It will also be recalled that the powerful and dangerous spirit Mercurius in the Grimm fairy tale 'The Spirit in the Bottle' was locked up in the roots of a tree. Similar constellations of imagery reappear in the story *Der Goldene Topf* by E.T.A.Hoffmann.

<sup>45</sup> The Melusina, Jung points out, was often related to the siren, dangerous, tricky and irresistably attractive. He quotes Vecerius as saying: "Melusina, or Melysina, comes from an island in the sea where nine sirens dwell, who can change into any shape they want." (Jung, *Collected Works* 13, p. 178) By tradition they "cause storms, can change their shape, cure incurable diseases, and know the future." (Ibid., p. 178) Jung goes on to remark that these abilities have traditionally been shared by the alchemical Mercurius.

<sup>46</sup> Jung, 'Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon', *Collected Works* 13, pp. 109-89



existit, cum mors tum vita Scaiolarum. Annuit praeterea prima tempora, sed ad finem seipsum immutat. Ex quibus colligo supermonica figmenta in cyphantis aperire fenestram. Sed ut ea figantur, recusant gesta Melosynes, quae cuiusmodi sunt, missa facimus. Sed ad naturam nymphididicam. Ea ut in animis nostris concipiatur, atque ita ad annum aniadin immortales perveniamus arripimus characteres Veneris, quos et si vos una cum aliis cognoscitis, minime tamen usurpatis. Idipsum autem absolvimus eo quod in prioribus capitibus indicavimus, ut hanc vitam secure tandem adsequamur, in quo aniadus dominatur ac regnat, et cum eo, cui sine fine assistimus, permanet. Haec atque alia arcana, nulla re prorsus indigent.

(And in this manner, through the intervention of the Scaiolae, Melusina departs from her nymphididic nature, to remain in another transmutation if that difficult Adech permit, who rules over both the death and life of the Scaiolae. Moreover, he permits the first times, but at the end he changes himself. From which I conclude that the supermonic figments in the Cyphanta open a window. But in order to become fixed, they have to oppose the acts of Melusina, which, of whatever kind they may be, we dismiss to the nymphididic realm. But in order that [she] may be conceived in our minds, and we arrive immortal at the year Aniadin, we take the characters of Venus, which, even if you know yourselves one with others, you have nevertheless put to little use. With this we conclude what we treated of in the earlier chapters, that we may safely attain that life over which Aniadus dominates and reigns, and which endures for ever with him, in whom we are present without end. This and other mysteries are in need of nothing whatever.)<sup>47</sup>

Jung quotes Dorn's commentary on this enigmatic passage:

[Paracelsus] ait Melisinam, i.e. apparentem in mente visionem... e nymphididica natura, in aliam transmutattionem abire, in qua permansura[m] esse, si modo difficilis ille Adech, interior homo vdl. annuerit, hoc est, faveret: qui quidem utrunque efficit, videlicet mortem, et vitam Scaiolarum, i.e. mentalium operationum. Harum tempora prima, i.e. initia annuit, i.e. admittit, sed ad finem seipsum immutat, intellige propter intervenientes ac impediendes distractiones, quo minus consequantur effectum inchoatae, scl. operationes. Ex quibus [Paracelsus] colligit supermonica figmenta, hoc est, speculationes aenigmaticas, in cyphantis [vas stillatorium], i.e. separationum vel praeparationum operationibus, aperire fenestram, hoc est, intellectum, sed ut figantur, i.e. ad finem perducantur, recusant gesta Melosines, hoc est, visionum varietates, et observationes, quae cuius modi sunt (ait) missa facimus. Ad naturam nymphididicam rediens, ut in animis nostris concipiatur, inquit atque hac via ad annum aniadin perveniamus, hoc est, ad vitam longam per imaginationem, arripimus characteres Veneris, i.e. amoris scutum et loricam ad viriliter adversis resistendum obstaculis: amor enim omnem difficultatem superat: quos et si vos una cum aliis cognoscitis, putato characteres, minime tamen usurpatis.

([Paracelsus] says that Melusina, i.e. the vision appearing in the mind, departs from her nymphididic nature into another transmutation, in which she will remain if only that difficult Adech, that is, the inner man, permit, that is, approve: who brings about both, that is, death and life, of the Scaiolae, that is, the mental operations. The first times, that is, the beginnings, of these he permits, that is, favours; but at the end he changes himself, namely because of the distractions that intervene and impede, so that the things begun, that is, the operations, do not obtain their effect. From which [Paracelsus] concludes that the supermonic figments, that is, enigmatical speculations, in the Cyphanta [distilling vessel], open a window, that is, the understanding, by means of the operations of separation or preparation; but in order to become fixed, that is, brought to an end, they have to oppose the acts of Melusina, that is, divers visions and observations, which of whatever kind they may be, he says, we dismiss. Returning to the nymphididic realm, in order that [she] may be conceived in our minds, and that in this way we may attain to the year Aniadin, that is, to a long life by imagination, we take the characters of Venus, that is, the shield and buckler of love, to resist manfully the obstacles that confront us, for

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<sup>47</sup> Paracelsus, *De vita longa* V, v, pp. 94f., quoted in Jung, *Collected Works* 13, pp. 173f. (translation R.F.C. Hull). Jung explains 'supermonic' as 'inspired from above' and 'the year Aniadin' as 'the time of perfection'. He points out that 'in need of nothing whatever' is a favourite saying in alchemy referring to the *lapis*. Jung remarks: "The obscurities of this last chapter have no parallel in all Paracelsus's writings."! Jung goes on to connect the appearance of Melusina with Dante's Beatrice and the Helen of Goethe's *Faust*.



love overcomes all difficulties; which characters, even if you know yourselves one with others, you have nevertheless put to little use.<sup>48</sup>

Applied to *The Tempest*, this would mean that the appearance of Ariel, who is the Melusina and hermaphroditic Mercurius, can be attributed to the driving spiritual forces emanating from Adech (Enoch), the Anthropos or *homo maximus*. This state is the goal to be achieved in the self-transformation of the Magus Prospero. However, Adech is described as "difficult", as he controls the mental processes but is not completely tractable. In a similar development to that described by Jung as 'individuation', the apparent opposites manifesting themselves in the unconscious need to become integrated with the conscious personality to reveal a transcendent Self. Mercurius is to accompany and enable the process of reintegrating Prospero's own unconscious *prima materia*, Caliban, and transforming it in a way that cannot be achieved by mere attempts at education, equivalent to changes in the conscious attitude:

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature  
Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,  
Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;<sup>49</sup>

while at the same time re-enacting the alchemical wedding and manifesting it in the world of material reality. In order to complete this operation, the 'supermonic' figments or speculative intuitions have to be clarified by an alchemical process of separation and preparation such as takes place among the shipwrecked party. Finally, in order to fix these alchemical results it is necessary for Ariel to be released and return to his / her element, leaving the "characters of Venus" which have not yet been put to full use. Jung comments that the 'acts of Melusina' "are deceptive fantasms compounded of supreme sense and the most pernicious nonsense"<sup>50</sup> like the products of the creative imagination.

Melusina, the deceptive Shakti, must return to the watery realm if the work is to reach its goal. She should no longer dance before the adept with alluring gestures, but must become what she was from the beginning: a part of his wholeness. As such she must be 'conceived in the mind'. This leads to a union of conscious and unconscious that was always present unconsciously but was always denied by the one-sidedness of the conscious attitude.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Dorn, *De vita longa*, p. 178, quoted in Jung, *Collected Works* 13, pp. 174f. (translation Hull)

<sup>49</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest* IV.i.188ff.

<sup>50</sup> Jung, 'Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon', *Collected Works* 13, p. 180

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.180f.



Being a "nymph o' the' sea" and "subject to No sight but thine and mine; invisible to every eyeball else"<sup>52</sup> is only one of Ariel's manifestations. He / she has affinities with all four elements, performing tasks which require him / her

To tread the ooze of the salt deep,  
To run upon the sharp wind of the north,  
To do me business in the veins o' th' earth  
When it is baked with frost"<sup>53</sup>

as well as to appear during the storm in the form of St Elmo's (or Hermes') fire. Ariel is often manifested as music, and indeed it is striking what a prominent and enigmatic role music plays in Ariel's interventions.<sup>54</sup> Though Ariel appears harmless and minute:

Where the bee sucks, there suck I:  
In a cowslip's bell I lie<sup>55</sup>

when "correspondent to command",<sup>56</sup> it is through Ariel's power, and through Ariel that of the 'elves' and other spirits, that Prospero is able to perform magic ranging from the creation of the storm and preservation of its victims to the full palette of magical power over the material world which he adumbrates in the great renunciation speech of Act V, Scene i. This is dangerous supernatural power whose effects are only glimpsed in Ariel's appearance as a Harpy in Act III, which has such devastating psychological effects on Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio that they are reduced to abject states of clinical madness.<sup>57</sup>

It is therefore no paradox that we have stressed the association of Ariel and Mercurius working through an Anima projection. Simon Magus is said to have spoken of a marriage between the sun and the moon, corresponding with himself and Helen, which produced a

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<sup>52</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest* I.ii.301ff.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., I.ii.252-6

<sup>54</sup> In an illuminating investigation of this theme, Pierre Iseline draws attention to a number of aspects which touch on the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition including Cornelius Agrippa's description, borrowed from Capella, of the 'nymphs Islands' in Lydia which can move from the shore to mid-sea to conduct dances. Iseline concentrates on the ambivalent nature of music: "La musique, par son pouvoir, convainc même quand elle ment, comme le théâtre. Mensonge dramatique et vérité théâtrale sont ainsi liés dans un rapport de non-contradiction quasi spéculaire. Le premier chant d'Ariel jonglait déjà avec les limites, puisque les mots commandaient aux esprits de calmer la tempête (<kissed the wild waves whist>), puis de participer au jeu des illusions acoustiques, auquel aurait pu participer Puck. (Music, by its power, is convincing even when it lies, like theatre. Dramatic lie and theatrical truth are thus linked in a kind of mirrored non-contradictory relationship. Even Ariel's first song juggles with limits, since its words ordered the spirits to calm the storm ('kissed the wild waves whist'), then to join in the game of acoustic illusions which Puck himself might have been involved in. Iseline, *The Tempest et ses Musiques: Myth et Dramaturgie*, *Études Anglaises* 47/4, 1993, p. 389 - my translation)

<sup>55</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest* V.i.88f.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., I.ii.297

<sup>57</sup> It is power worthy not only of Medea, but also of Mephistopheles.



"masculo-feminine pneuma, curiously designated 'Air'".<sup>58</sup> In alchemical terms this recalls the starting point of the *opus* from the *Tabula Smaragdina*:

And as all things proceed from the One, through the mediation of the One, so all things proceed from this one thing, by adaptation.  
Its father is the Sun, its mother the Moon; the wind hath carried it in his belly.

In Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* we read:

Physically it is the Embryo, which in a little time ought to be borne into the light. I say also that Arithmetically it is the Root of a Cube; Musically it is the Disdiapason; Geometrically it is a point, the beginning of a continued running line; Astronomically it is the Centre of the Planets Saturn, Jupiter and Mars...

Nor is it indeed without reason that Mercury is called the Messenger or Interpreter & as it were the running intermediate Minister of the other Gods and has Wings fitted to his head and feet.

The wings are those of the creative imagination. Paracelsus, according to Pagel, gave a similar central role to the imagination:

All action is visualised by Paracelsus as flowing from an act of imagination — a process not connected with formal logical reasoning, but with the spirit-conscious or subconscious and in a broad sense embracing all strata of the personality.<sup>59</sup>

As in the bargain between Faustus and Mephistopheles, Prospero obtains Ariel's services for a limited time. In fact the number 12 is again central; 12 years of service with Prospero follow the 12 years of Ariel's confinement in the tree, making up the 24 years' total of Mephistopheles' service, again perhaps symbolic of the clock itself. The action of the play takes place within a single day, during the course of about four hours. An impression is given that the work of a lifetime, or of some greater period of time beyond it spanning the interests of the characters involved in the play, is brought to an intense focus within a particular time and a specific relationship. This sense of urgency and the limit of time in Prospero's conducting of the *opus* is stressed by numerous mentions of the time and repetitions of Ariel's request to be free. Prospero is reluctant to let Ariel go of course. As a projection of Mercurius in the form of the Anima, he / she is fascinating and alluring as well as a trickster ("My tricky spirit",<sup>60</sup> "My dainty Ariel",<sup>61</sup> "my bird",<sup>62</sup> "My Ariel, chick"<sup>63</sup>). His tenderness for Ariel exceeds that for Miranda, and although their conversations are

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Jung, *Collected Works* 14, p. 136.

<sup>59</sup> Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, p. 94

<sup>60</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest* V.i.227

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., V.i.95

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., IV.i.184

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., V.i.316



sometimes reminiscent of the travelling conjurer and his boy assistant,<sup>64</sup> the erotic charge of desire in Prospero is sometimes hard to disguise.<sup>65</sup> As was shown in *Doctor Faustus*, the erotic desire for control of the material is what drives the creative imagination to aspire to a godlike status, but at the same time is the danger that must be overcome if the Gnostic seeker is not to fall.

For this reason the relationship between Prospero and Ariel becomes central to the play, and can shed light on passages that have puzzled commentators. For instance, in Act I, Scene 2, Prospero accuses Ariel of forgetfulness and asks him / her where Sycorax was born. Ariel immediately replies "in Argier", but Prospero continues as if that were the wrong answer, although five lines later he confirms that it was indeed the case. Why then does Prospero have to repeat the story "once in a month"? One explanation is that in recounting it (in dramatic form on stage) he can act out the imprisonment of Ariel, being able to hold Ariel in material form, the thing he desires to do most and yet the one thing he is not allowed to do if he is to distinguish himself successfully from Sycorax and reverse the Gnostic fall.

Similarly, before the masque of Act IV Ariel, in promising to bring the spirits, breaks into a little verse:

Before you can say, "come," and "go,"  
And breathe twice, and cry, "so, so,"  
Each one, tripping on his toe,  
Will be here with mop and mow.  
Do you love me, master? no?

Prospero replies:

Dearly, my delicate Ariel<sup>66</sup>

This might pass unnoticed in performance, if it were not for the excessively harsh rebuke Prospero immediately delivers to Ferdinand and Miranda, who are clearly enjoying a quick kiss. The overreaction gives the clue that Prospero is being tempted to the limits of his endurance. That, after all, is the unintegrated part of him, the nature of Caliban and of Sycorax. But it is also, paradoxically, the source of the energy with which his magic is performed, by which the boundary between being and non-being (*on kai me on*) may be

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<sup>64</sup> A point convincingly illustrated by Barbara Mowat in 'Prospero, Agrippa, and Hocus Pocus, *English Literary Renaissance* 11 (1981): 281-303

<sup>65</sup> This aspect of the relationship between Prospero and Ariel underlies Paul Theroux's novel *Milroy the Magician* with its story of Milroy, a conjurer with powers that veer towards the messianic and his tomboy assistant Jilly Farina.







If it should be objected that they are the king and queen of fairies and therefore legitimately have the task of controlling nature, like classical gods and goddesses, it should be remembered that Titania and Oberon bear such a close relationship of analogy to the 'real' queen and king of Athens that they are usually played by the same actress and actor. Analogy is not a one-way street, even if the more comforting interpretation is the conventionally mimetic one.

The point is that there is a correspondence between the inner and outer world; that certain phenomena are more susceptible to it than others; that people are more or less influenced by those correspondences, and that the correspondences appear to be under the influence of the conscious will, given the right circumstances. The circumstances involve particular attitudes of mind giving access through the imagination to levels of the psyche which are normally unconscious, where archetypal images grow which stand in a relationship of projection to the inner world, and where the outer world in its turn conforms to those images and projections.

In alchemy, the appearance of Mercurius ushers in the *filius regis*, who emerges from the sea. In *The Tempest* this is the position of Ferdinand, who is led by Ariel's music, mourning for his drowned father. Ariel is again the trickster, encouraging Ferdinand's belief in the death of his father and the old dispensation, while hinting at the alchemical transmutation to come:

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.<sup>69</sup>

Pearls and coral, with quicksilver, are important alchemical ingredients. Ferdinand is to be introduced to Miranda, but first he must undergo a reduction to the status of Caliban, eating pig-food, drinking salt water, manacled in a hoop, and made a log-carrier. The spiritualization of their love under such circumstances is contrasted with the reduction of Trinculo and Stephano to bickering pig-like drunkenness as Caliban mistakes them for gods. They are led into a slimy bog before being hunted by their own desires in the form of

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<sup>69</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest* I.ii.399-404



animals,<sup>70</sup> an illustration of addiction. The rest of the court party are led through a labyrinth to a confrontation with their own natures at the Harpy's banquet, before being imprisoned in psychic inertia, as the sailors are held below decks on their arrested ship.

Transformations occur with all of these to a greater or lesser extent. Caliban, in spite of what Prospero maintains, is beginning to learn before the spirit-hounds are set on him. He is not fooled by the theatrical wardrobe (an erroneous use of the imagination) that distracts his companions, and he fears being turned into a monkey:

I will have none on't: we shall lose out time,  
And all be turn'd to barnacles, or to apes  
With foreheads villainous low.<sup>71</sup>

Whether he subsequently takes back his freedom or is granted it, there is hope for him.

Alonso and Gonzalo are the most affected by the change, and when the new royal pair of the 'chymical wedding' are revealed in Prospero's cell playing chess, but setting love (the 'characters of Venus') above political gain — a moment when in our production the screen showing projected images at the centre of Prospero's cell was removed so that the young couple themselves will step forward — they are immediately prepared to rearrange their new reality according to the transformation. But not all is transformed. Miranda emerges with the naïvety of Caliban when she sees in Antonio and Sebastian the bright citizens of a 'brave new world'. Their cynical belief in their own superiority simply awaits another opportunity for action. The intellectual and the witty, devoid of wonder, who are convinced they 'see things as they are' in the material world, are the new men of the coming age. There is to be no dawning Utopia.

Prospero himself is also transformed, not only by regaining his dukedom and thus his place within the social world, but also, prompted by Ariel, by renouncing his claim to vengeance and the power he has learnt to exert over the material world. His choice is to return to time and to things as they are. Thus his moment of renunciation and the parting from Ariel have the scent of tragedy rather than the aura of the triumphant apotheosis which is sometimes claimed for them,<sup>72</sup> although it is not the resignation of the 'spent mage'

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<sup>70</sup> This is reminiscent of the fate of the 'clown' characters in *Doctor Faustus*.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.i.247ff.

<sup>72</sup> Frances Yates talks about "the triumph of a reforming magus in the dream world of the magical island" (Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A New Approach*, p. 94), and Jeffrey Hart sees the ending of *The*



either.<sup>73</sup> The Epilogue is an appeal to the indulgence of the collective, in which Prospero seems to move outside his role to address the audience, and yet does not, for the analogies of the play continue to echo (he is not being sent to Naples, and the applause is not wind for his sails). Magic appears to have been abandoned, and humanity left alone on a bare stage, and yet this perception has become perilous.

If we return our attention to the masque we discover the same principles of metonymy and analogy being applied within the new context of strict allegory where psychic projections become fixed as though they were discrete external realities. In this case the goddesses, nymphs and reapers enact a wedding ceremony for the couple. Iris, the shimmering Mercurius, is accompanied by Juno, the queen of the sky, and Ceres, the queen of the fruitful earth.<sup>74</sup> The fourth, Venus, erotic natural love, is missing. Ceres is only prepared to give her blessing when Venus is absent since she is the cause of the rape of Proserpine and thus of the seasons. And yet of course fruitfulness is impossible without Venus and the reproductive process, the desire of nature represented by Caliban, so it is scarcely surprising that Prospero ends the masque with his sudden gesture, prompting the spirits to 'heavily vanish', and with the words:

I had forgot that foul conspiracy  
Of the beast Caliban and his confederates  
Against my life:<sup>75</sup>

although it transpires that he actually has the conspiracy very much under control. The moment is followed by an extraordinarily allusive speech:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air:  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.<sup>76</sup>

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*Tempest* as unalloyed harmony when "the fulfillment of love follows immediately upon the renunciation of power." (Hart, 'Prospero and Faustus', *Boston University Studies in English*, 11/4, 1956/57, p. 202

<sup>73</sup> Comparing Prospero with Lear's vision inspired by 'poor Tom' of the 'poor, bare, forked animal' Cosmo Corfield concludes: "Prospero's demiurgic bid for freedom has ended. Like the escaped prisoner, he is caught and tethered back to reality again." (Corfield, 'Why Does Prospero Abjure His "Rough Magic"?', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36, 1985, p. 48).

<sup>74</sup> In alchemy, Iris and the peacocks of Juno (*cauda pavonis*, the palatial peacock's tail) heralded the completion of the *opus*. (Jung, *Collected Works* 14, pp. 290f.)

<sup>75</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest* IV.i.139ff



Reuben Brower gives a masterful analysis of this passage to show the working of transformation and analogy, pointing out how nearly all the linguistic imagery used in *The Tempest* recurs in these few lines: tempest, dream, palaces, music, and change. The 'stuff' of dreams is air and cloth and projection: baseless fabric. It recalls the refreshed garments that amaze Gonzalo. Brower goes further:

We read first: that like the actors and scenery of the vision, earth's glories and man shall vanish into nothingness. Through a happy mistake we also read otherwise. By the time we have passed through 'dissolve', 'insubstantial', and 'faded', and reached 'leave not a rack behind', we are reading 'cloud-capped towers' in reverse as a metaphor of tower-like clouds. 'Towers', 'palaces', 'temples', 'the great globe', 'all which it inherit' are now taken for cloud forms. Through a sort of Proustian merging of icon and subject, we experience the blending of states of being, of substantial and unsubstantial, or real and unreal, which is the essence of *The Tempest* metamorphosis.<sup>77</sup>

In this context 'Our little life' comes to mean the microcosm, and the 'great globe' the macrocosm as much as the theatre where the vision will be continually re-formed and dissolved.<sup>78</sup> Shakespeare sets out a vision where the opposition between being and non-being (*on kai me on*) is superseded and time ceases to have a bounding function. The fabric of this vision, being 'baseless', is the alchemical material of the seamless garment demanded by the lover in the folksong in the impossible seigniory of Faust between the sea and the land.<sup>79</sup> When life is 'rounded' with a sleep, there is not only the sense of the proximity of consciousness and unconsciousness, but also the intuition that this vision of the circle of completeness can be recovered when the conscious is grounded in and integrated with the unconscious.

So it is justifiable to see, as Peter Greenaway does in his film *Prospero's Books*, that when Prospero breaks his magic staff and drowns his book, that book might be rescued by Caliban for future generations, and that the book might be the play itself, the product of the creative imagination and at the same time a book of spells on how the imagination could be

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., IV.i.146-58

<sup>77</sup> Brower, 'The Mirror of Analogy', in Palmer (ed.), *Shakespeare: The Tempest; A Casebook*, p. 144

<sup>78</sup> Flagstad remarks that the end of the Masque is like a break in a rehearsal. Pagel points out that Paracelsus taught that "the body and indeed the whole world will eventually dissolve and revert to the 'spirit of smoke'", i.e. the soul. (Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, p. 94)

<sup>79</sup> "Tell her to make me a cambric shirt  
Without any seam or needlework"  
is another of the tasks from 'Scarborough Fair' (see p. 70n.).



applied. In the old grimoires, one way of making a magic book even more potent was by burying it for a while, ideally at a crossroads, so that it could be dug up later.



Part II

Overgrown Paths



## Chapter Four

### Renaissance and Enlightenment: Kepler and Fludd

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To recap on what has been shown in the previous chapters, the Renaissance Magus, drawing on the resources of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition, attempts to manipulate the material world through the creative imagination. He is the archetypal Gnostic seer whose fall is illustrated in Faustus, and yet who might find in the cause of his fall the means to reverse it. In tracing the development of this archetype over the intervening period of hegemonic European and neo-European (Western) culture we shall observe how it becomes split into two figures who are 'adversarial twins';<sup>1</sup> the one for whom the laws of the 'real' and material can be codified and put to use is most aptly embodied in the engineer (and empire-builder), and the other, whose reliance on the imagination makes him hover on the obscurely numinous margins as an eccentric, is the poet (and visionary).

Particular factors which delineate the progress of the split are firstly the loss of the sense of unity of being, reflected in the way language is turned from being an organism of metonymy and analogy into a tool of 'single vision', secondly the denial of the feminine, as consciousness ostensibly distinguishes itself from the unconscious, projecting it into perceivable reality and there, ironically, falling under its spell, and finally the status and appreciation of the imagination. It will be clear in this that the glass slipper of gnosis is never quite lost, so that, when the Mephistophelian project falters, the old archetypes can be reactivated within a still living tradition.

In the second part of this study I shall use the ideas of 'poles of adversarial twinships' to exemplify the stages of the split and potential reconciliation. Beginning with a comparison of Johannes Kepler and Robert Fludd, I will move on to Newton and the way he is treated by Blake, before approaching the twentieth century with the contrasting use of the occult in

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase is drawn from Wilson Harris, 'Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins', *Selected Essays*, pp. 58-66. See also the discussion on p. 260n.



Aleister Crowley and W.B. Yeats, and the *rapprochement* between science and the irrational in Wolfgang Pauli and C.G. Jung. In this it will be seen how marginalized resources within Europe prepare the ground for postcolonial responses. In the final part of the thesis I will turn to the way postcolonial writers have drawn on the cross-cultural imagination to articulate the 'Third Space of enunciations'<sup>2</sup> to regenerate a universal Gnostic potential.

Shakespeare's vision enunciated by Prospero of a cosmos united by analogy, revealed to the imagination in the substance of insubstantial air at its moment of fading, finds its closest correlative in the thought of Robert Fludd. Fludd (1574-1637) was the author of a monumental and lavishly illustrated attempt to summarize knowledge about the universe: *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris scilicet et Minoris Metaphysica Physica atque Technica Historia*, published in Oppenheim by De Bry between 1617 and 1621, which can be regarded as the last great Renaissance flowering of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.<sup>3</sup> Fludd begins with the proposition that the whole universe is united in God. He quotes the *Corpus Hermeticum* in asserting:

All things depend on one principle or beginning, that is one sole Unity, and this principle or beginning is moved, that it may again become a principle, and yet nevertheless it is but one thing only, that does effect it, not departing from the nature of Unity.<sup>4</sup>

To this may be added the further quote from the *Asclepius*: "God is the centre of everything, whose circumference is nowhere to be found,"<sup>5</sup> which Fludd interprets as meaning "in all and beyond all"; it can be compared with the principles from the *Tabula Smaragdina*: 'What is below is like what is above; everything is produced by the one.'

However, the process of creation requires a separation, a bodying forth in material of the archetypal ideas:

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<sup>2</sup> Homi Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.38f. (See pp. 10f.)

<sup>3</sup> This book seems to be where most of the vague ideas about the microcosm and the macrocosm which have been current ever since originated. Fludd had read widely in the Gnostic / Hermetic and alchemical tradition, as is clear from his frequent quotations from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Reuchlin, Agrippa, Dee and Paracelsus. After graduating he spent six years abroad before returning to Oxford, where he was admitted a Fellow after some delay, probably caused by his clear preference for the new Paracelsian or 'chemical' tradition of medicine, which had awakened the animosity of the old Galenist or Aristotelian establishment. For a biography of Fludd, see Huffman, *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance* (1988) or Craven, *Doctor Robert Fludd* (1902); see also Heisler, 'Robert Fludd: a Picture in Need of Expansion' (*Alchemy web site*, originally in *The Hermetic Journal*, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Fludd, *Mosaical Philosophy*, Book I, Chapter 2 (*Alchemy web site*, [www.levit.com/alchemy](http://www.levit.com/alchemy))

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I Chapter 2



Everything that is begotten, precipitated, created, produced, or separated, doth radically proceed from the one which is unbegotten, infinite, not made or created, nor separated, but only one Unity, individual in its essence.<sup>6</sup>

In other words the realm of *on kai me on* (being or not being) and of time is the created universe, and this results from a separation of the principles of light and darkness. These Fludd represents as triangles interpenetrating each other. The pure light of the upper triangle, the divine principle, shines down with ever decreasing strength until it reaches the area of pure material, the earth. The intermediate realms will have ever decreasing proportions of light or ever increasing proportions of darkness.<sup>7</sup> As opposed to the Manichean dualistic system, or the 'pessimistic' branch of Gnosticism, Fludd maintains that the principle of light or 'Volunty' and the opposing dark principle of 'Nolunty' are subsumed in a common identity,<sup>8</sup> so that they form a syzygy of 'adversarial twins': "For his Volunty and Nolunty is but all one in him that is one simple Identity."<sup>9</sup> A human being, however, as creature, should accord supremacy to the light component:

For when he hides his face, all is deformed, and as it were devoid of essence and goodness. Lo, here is his Volunty, negative or privative, which may be rightly termed his Nolunty. If his affirmation have dominion, he emits the beauty of his benignity.<sup>10</sup>

In the place where the elements of light and darkness mingle are the waters, and the visible material universe is generated in those. Here Fludd comes interestingly close to a concept of reflection, or projection, as this water is needed to produce sensible forms from the mixture of light and darkness, which are created through the "Spagericall or high Chymicall virtue of the word, and working of the spirit." Within the realm of the created universe, the traditional four elements are arranged in ascending order, and can be transformed into each other by condensation and rarefaction.

Turning our attention to Fludd's graphical representation of the universe, 'Integra Naturae speculum Artisque imago',<sup>11</sup> we note that the earth is at the centre with the sun revolving around it, but that the sun takes on a special importance, being placed in the centre of creation between the light and dark principles. It becomes, then, the centre of the projected

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Fludd, *Utriusque cosmi...historia*, discussed in Westman, 'Nature, art and psyche', Vickers (ed), *Occult and scientific mentalities in the Renaissance*, pp. 190-4. There are some striking similarities between these ideas and the interpenetrating cones in Yeats, *A Vision*, pp. 67-80.

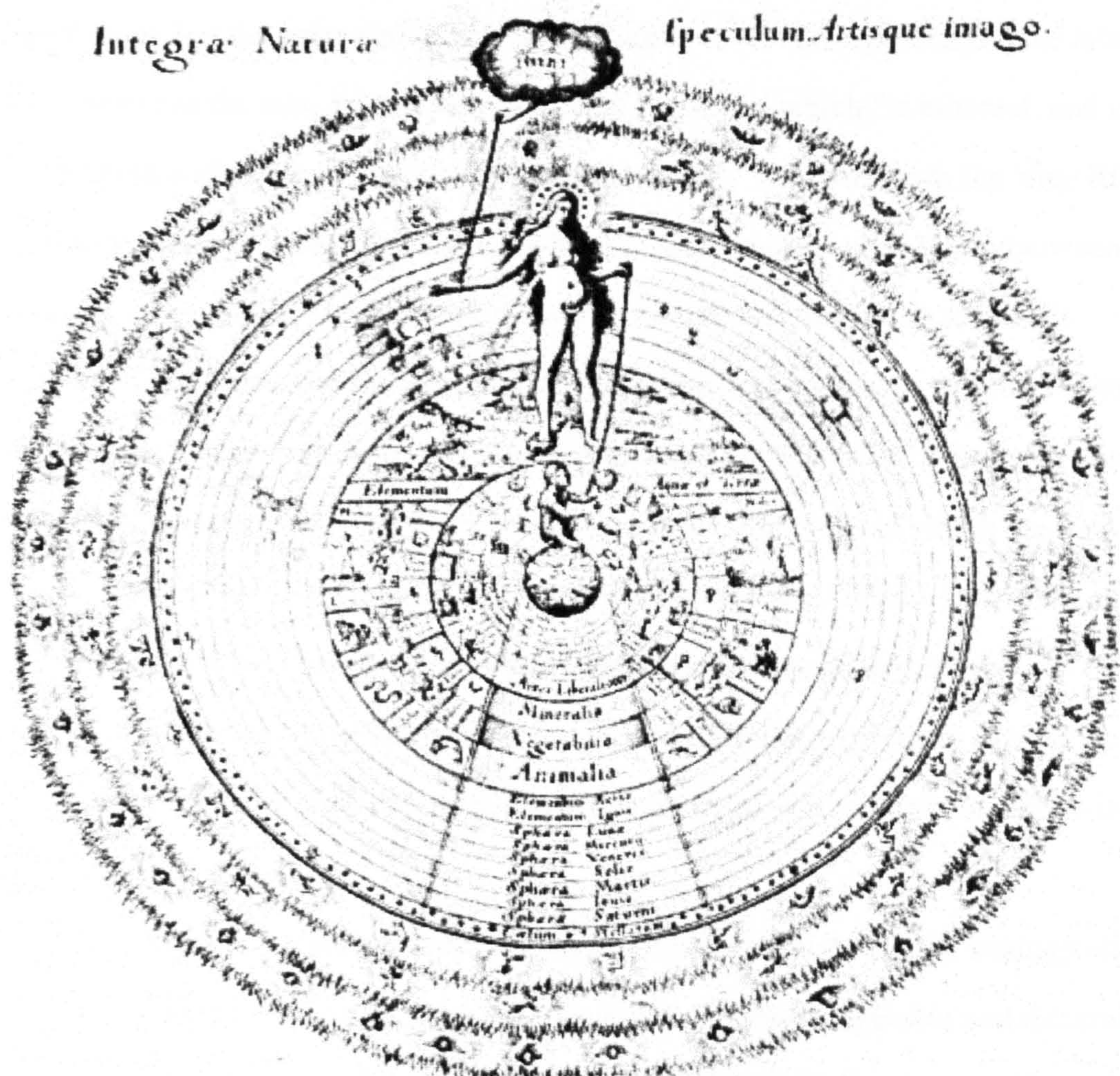
<sup>8</sup> Fludd compares them to Reuchlin's 'light Aleph and dark Aleph'.

<sup>9</sup> Fludd, *Mosaical Philosophy*, Book I, Chapter 3

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Book I, Chapter 3



world, where material images are made real. This privileged position of balance makes it "the heart of heaven",<sup>12</sup> not identical with God, because created, but a house of the heavenly Spirit. The material aspect of the human being is portrayed as the small ape in the centre; but he holds a chain leading to a beautiful woman, who in turn establishes the connection to the 'unknown God' represented by the Tetragrammaton outside the circular frame. This image of the 'eternal feminine' or anima figure is elsewhere portrayed as the 'anima mundi' with



7. Fludd, 'Integra Naturae speculum Artisque imago'

the sun and moon and crowned with stars. As such she also represents the 'quinessentia', the *lapis* of the alchemical process, and thus Mercurius, as the means of moving through the different spheres. The orbit of the sun passes through her womb.

Fludd is mainly concerned, though, to show correspondences. Thus, in another illustration,<sup>13</sup> he shows the human body as a microcosm corresponding to the earlier vision

<sup>11</sup> Fludd, *Utriusque cosmi...historia*, pp. 4f.

<sup>12</sup> Fludd, *Mosaical Philosophy*, p. 65

<sup>13</sup> Fludd, *Utriusque cosmi...historia* II i, p. 105



of the universe. Here the divine presence is just above the head and can be reached by the spiritual faculties situated in the cranium, which are almost pure light, while the sexual organs are at the centre of darkness. The heart corresponds with the sun, around which, incidentally, Fludd imagined the blood circulating, as he assumed the terrestrial winds to be driven by the sun's motion. As a result Fludd vehemently defended his friend Harvey's controversial new theories published in *De motu cordis*. The threefold system means that the intellect corresponds with the divine archetypes, the reproductive system with matter in its mortal form, but the heart and its emotions, chiefly love, corresponding to the tabernacle of God's power in the sun, are the seat of a 'vital life force' which "is ethereal, and is connected both with the true mind and the animal spirit".<sup>14</sup> Only through the 'vital life force' is the transmutation of alchemy possible, which suggests a close connection between it and the creative imagination. Westman takes a similar view, pointing out that Fludd's 'Imaginative Soul' "links the Intellect and the Sensitive Soul by means of images," and that it creates consciousness not by numbering and division but by "creating pictures of unity".<sup>15</sup> Though Fludd's system points to the heart as the centre of gravity, in which the image-making capacity coupled to an emotional charge is the essential Gnostic link to the divine Anthropos standing between the divine power of the supernatural and the power of the material world, it is becoming dangerously separated from the projections of the material available to the cold eye of the intellect. From this point on an irreconcilable split will open between them.

For Fludd, the microcosm and macrocosm accord so variously that by analogy all parts of the external universe, the angels, stars and planets, the animal, vegetable and mineral world, but also the world of ideas and the different arts and sciences all become closely connected. The occult sciences play a special role, because they use the correspondences to operate on the real world of nature. Fludd thus felt justified in adapting ideas from a variety of sources if they fit the overall scheme. Unlike many Paracelsians, he accepted the Aristotelian theory of humours in close connection with astrological influences on the body. Dreams, he believed, were caused by tiny evil spirits in the atmosphere which can enter the body by

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<sup>14</sup> Craven, *Doctor Robert Fludd; The English Rosicrucian: Life and Writing*, p. 96

<sup>15</sup> Westman, 'Nature, Art and Psyche' in Vickers (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, p. 200

inhalation or through the pores of the skin. They are borne on the wind by four demons, and may be warded off by four corresponding angels. On a spiritual level, all human beings would be subject to the influence of good or evil spirits or angels corresponding to the tendencies and balances within themselves, which could be seen as personal devils or guardian angels.

It is justifiable to ask to what extent Fludd viewed his system and the alchemy linked with it as purely figurative. Though alchemy for him was spiritual and not a real attempt to make gold,<sup>16</sup> he argued forcefully for the truth of transmutation, the self-propagation of metals, and that the daily bread of the Lord's Prayer was a physical substance emanating from the sun.<sup>17</sup> He expected the physical reality he observed to conform by analogy to his vision of universal harmony, and then to be experimentally verifiable. This led him to conduct an experiment by which he might have discovered oxygen if he had not been trying to show the difference between the mind and the body.<sup>18</sup> Fludd, like other followers of Paracelsus, was interested in an objective correlative of the Spirit Mercurius, which seemed to some to be found in a trilogy of chemical reagents: mercury, sulphur and salt (particularly saltpetre). This led to a reification of Mercurius as a 'life-spirit' called 'aerial nitre' consonant with Paracelsus' opinion that a vital power in the air was essential to both combustion and breathing.

Nothing exemplifies the transitional phase of the new vision of external reality and the possibilities of intervening in its workings better than the notorious 'weapon-salve' controversy and Fludd's part in it.<sup>19</sup> The 'weapon-salve', whose first use was attributed to Paracelsus, was an ointment composed of, among other ingredients, powdered mummy and fat of man. With the addition of a little blood from the wounded person the ointment was applied, not to the wound but to the weapon that had inflicted it. The wound itself was merely dressed freshly each day with a cloth soaked in the patient's urine.

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<sup>16</sup> Increasing numbers of alchemists were claiming to have mastered physical transmutation to obtain positions with sympathetic or impecunious sovereigns. See Evans, *Rudolf II and his World*, pp.196-242, and Moran, *The Alchemical World of the German Court: Occult philosophy and chemical medicine in the circle of Moritz of Hessen (1572-1632)*.

<sup>17</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, pp. 255 & 231

<sup>18</sup> Debus, *The English Paracelsians*, pp. 116ff.

<sup>19</sup> Debus offers an illuminating commentary on the whole weapon-salve affair in Debus, 'Robert Fludd and the use of Gilbert's *De Magnete* in the Weapon-Salve Controversy', *Journal of the History of Medicine and*



The cure, to those who asserted its efficacy, was effected at a distance, not by direct action of cause and effect, but by sympathetic powers operating on the blood through the mediation of the world spirit. As might be expected, the weapon-salve appealed particularly to those in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition for whom such a world-view, and the possibilities of magical action it afforded, was an ultimate reality. Their approach, being synthetic and intuitive rather than analytic and rational, meant that the secrets of reality would only yield themselves to those who had attained to the wisdom of the Magus. Fludd cited the weapon-salve as an instance of a larger picture: the scheme of microcosm and macrocosm. He was drawn into the controversy already raging in a virulent pamphlet war on the continent when he was attacked by an obscure English clergyman for supporting a cure which, if it worked at all, could only work by witchcraft: "That there is such a sympathy betwixt the blood in the body, and the blood drawn from the body is most evident by the example of Witches."<sup>20</sup> He further asserted: "Whatever works naturally, works either by corporall or virtuall contact. But this works by neither, therefore it works not naturally."<sup>21</sup>

Here, clearly, the demand for rational proof through observable material relationships runs parallel to the assertion of the existence of witches as an alternative reality, an irrational but equally material matrix for magical power which could increasingly be sought, found and prosecuted in the material world.<sup>22</sup> Fludd, of course, denies the charge. His reply draws heavily on Gilbert's *de Magnete* to show by analogy how sympathetic and repulsive forces may operate at a distance:

I think it most fit to search out diligently [...] the dark mystery of the Lodestone's or magnet's nature, that we may with the more assurance make our ingression into the practical demonstration, of so arcane and occult a contemplation.<sup>23</sup>

Many of Gilbert's experimental results are cited to justify Fludd's confidence in the weapon-salve, albeit at the expense of any of Gilbert's conclusions which do not fit in with Fludd's scheme.

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*Allied Sciences* 19, Bethesda. Md., 1964, pp 389-417, reprinted in Debus, *Chemistry, Alchemy and the New Philosophy, 1550-1700*.

<sup>20</sup> Debus, *Chemistry, Alchemy and the New Philosophy, 1550-1700*, p. 397

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed treatment of the witchcraft mania in Europe at this time, see Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 517-698. Thomas draws particular attention to the effect of "the superimposition of the theological concept of witchcraft upon the ancient belief in the possibility of *meleficium*" (p. 542)

<sup>23</sup> Debus, *Chemistry, Alchemy and the New Philosophy, 1550-1700*, p. 406

An even more prolonged and fundamental dispute in which Fludd became involved was that with Johannes Kepler about the structure of the universe.<sup>24</sup> In a notable essay, the physicist and pioneer of quantum mechanics Wolfgang Pauli took the controversy between Fludd and Kepler to be exemplary of the paradigm shift in the relationship between the observer and what is observed at this post-Faustian moment.<sup>25</sup> Confusingly for modern sensibilities, Kepler does not attack Fludd for founding his scheme on principles of world harmony derived from Plato and the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition — indeed Pauli convincingly demonstrates how fundamentally such archetypal images influenced Kepler's own ideas — but instead for regarding mathematical and analytical demonstrations within the world of material as inferior to the revealed mysteries of spiritual and alchemical truth.<sup>26</sup> Fludd replies, making it clear that his own view of science is an alchemical one:

Quod igitur ille multis verbis et longa oratione expressit, hoc ego brevibus contraxi, figurisque hieroglyphis et valde significantibus explicavi; non sane ideo, quia picturis delector (ut ipse alibi dicit) sed quoniam multa paucis congregare et more Chymicorum (quippe quem cum Chymicis et Hermeticis versari infra innuere videtur) extractam essentiam colligere, faeculentam vero substantiam relidere, et quod bonum est in suo proprio vasculo collocare decreveram...

(What he [Kepler] has said in many words and long speeches, I have summarized briefly and explained in deeply meaningful images, not because I am specially fond of pictures (as he maintains elsewhere), but because I (as one whom he suggests later on identifies with alchemists and hermetists) decided to concentrate much in a small space, to collect the essence I had extracted, to throw away the sediment, and to pour the goodness into a vessel fit to contain it...)<sup>27</sup>

He criticises simple mathematicians for being blinded by the 'shadows' of pure material:

...Nam mathematicorum vulgare est circa umbras quantitativas versari; Chymici et Hermetici veram corporum naturalium medullam amplectuntur.

(...For it is the business of ordinary mathematicians to concern themselves with the shadows of quantities; alchemists and hermetists grasp the real marrow of natural bodies.)<sup>28</sup>

Kepler, after years of struggle to measure and make sense of the mathematics of the observed solar system (with the aid of Brahe's observations) cannot follow Fludd down this traditional path. For him the observable world has priority:

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<sup>24</sup> The controversy began with a bitter attack by Kepler on Fludd's *Utriusque...cosmi historia*. Fludd's spirited defence elicited further polemics on both sides.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed analysis see Westman, 'Nature, Art, and Psyche: Jung, Pauli, and the Kepler-Fludd Polemic' in Vickers (Ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, pp. 177-229.

<sup>26</sup> Pauli, 'Der Einfluß archetypischer Vorstellungen auf die Bildung naturwissenschaftlicher Theorien bei Kepler', in Jung & Pauli, *Naturerklärung und Psyche*, p. 150

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 150f. (my translation)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 151f. (my translation)



... Quod igitur aenigmata tua, harmonica inquam, tenebrosa appello, loquor ex iudicio et captu meo, et habeo te astipulatorem, qui negas, tuam intentionem subjici demonstrationibus mathematicis, sine quibus ego coecus sum.

(That I term your so-called harmonious symbols dark I do according to my judgement and understanding, and I cite in support where you say that your intentions cannot be subjected to any mathematical test, without which I account myself blind.)<sup>29</sup>

But Pauli points out that Kepler too, for all his respect for observation and measurement, develops his own ideas from spiritual analogies. In particular, in *Harmonices Mundi*, Kepler accepts the heliocentric system because it is analogous to his belief in the trinity of God.<sup>30</sup> Kepler takes the sphere as the image of the trinity as it begins at a still centre (the creator) and then moves out from this potential to actuality in a straight dynamic line (the son) towards the actual of the curved circumference, which represents both the Holy Spirit (the ideal sphere) and the material world (imperfect circles)<sup>31</sup> Such a scheme conforms to the principles of aesthetic harmony passed down from Pythagoras and Euclidean geometry, and led him at first to expect the planets to have circular orbits; he later modified his views when his mathematics told him that such orbits were impossible, thus finally discovering their elliptical paths. Fludd would never have been prepared to do this.

From Pythagoras both Fludd and Kepler take the idea that harmony in interplanetary distances will be related to musical harmonies — what the Creator plays will be the music of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 153 (my translation)

<sup>30</sup> "Ja, es ist die hochheilige Dreifaltigkeit in einem sphaerico concavo und dasselbige in der Welt und prima persona, fons Deitatis, in centro, das centrum aber in der Sonnen, qui est in centro mundi, abgebildet; dann die auch ein Brunnquell alles Liechts Bewegung und Lebens in der Welt ist.

Also ist anima movens abgebildet in circulo potentiali das ist in puncto distincto: Also ist ein leiblich Ding, ein materia corporea abgebildet in tertia quantitatis specie trium dimensionum: also ist cuiusque materiae forma abgebildet in superficie. Dann wie ein materia von ihrer forma informiert wird, also wird auch ein geometrisches corpus gestaltet durch seine äußere Feldungen und superficies: deren Ding dann vielmehr angezogen werden könnten.

Wie nun der Schöpfer gespielet, also tat er auch die Natur als sein Ebenbild lehren spielen und zwar eben das Spiel, das er ihr vorgespielet..."

("Indeed it is the holiest Trinity in a sphaerico concavo and this within a world and prima persona, fons Deitatis, in centro, but the centre in the sun, which is pictured in the centre of the world, for that too is also the source of light, movement and life in the world.

So the anima movens is pictured in circulo potentiali which is in puncto distincto: it is in other words a corporeal thing, a materia corporea pictured in tertia quantitatis specie trium dimensionum: so it is pictured cuiusque materiae forma in superficie. For just as a materia is informed by its forma, so a geometrical corpus is formed by its outward boundaries and superficies: of which thing they may all the more partake.

Now what the Creator plays he has also taught nature created in his image to play, namely that which he has played to it.") (Ibid., pp. 129f. — my translation)

Pauli goes on to note: "Aus diesen Worten von einfacher Schönheit geht auch hervor, daß Kepler die Trinität mit der Dreidimensionalität des Raumes in Zusammenhang bringt und daß die Sonne mit den Planeten als weniger vollkommenes Abbild des abstrakten sphärischen Symbols angesehen wird."

(From these words of simple beauty it emerges that Kepler associates the trinity with the three-dimensionality of space and that the sun with its planets is seen as a less perfect copy of the abstract spherical symbol.") (Ibid., p. 130 — my translation)



the spheres. Fludd represents these on the 'monochord', in which by tradition the distances involved are related to simple proportions of a harmonic musical scale as created by lengths of strings on a stringed instrument. Pythagoras was supposed to have discovered these proportions when he heard hammers of different weights being used on metal and noticed their musical consonances.<sup>32</sup> Fludd applied the intervals to the interplanetary distances, starting with that from the earth to the moon, which represented a tone, from there to Mercury (a semitone), and so on to the sun and then to the other planets. These ideas were gradually debunked by contemporary scientists like Galileo's father, who proved that Pythagoras could not have conducted such an experiment, and yet Kepler, and later Newton, held to their truth, as being an image which had been misinterpreted.<sup>33</sup> For Kepler asserted that the magnitude of light would diminish as an inverse square proportion to the distance of its source, and that light and magnetic forces would emanate from the centre through all parts of the surface of the sphere, in which he approached very close to Newton's laws of gravity. Now the inverse square law happens to be the principle discovered by Pythagoras for measuring the length of strings proportionate to their weights and tensions in order to produce harmony. In other words the image derived from Pythagorean and Gnostic / Hermetic tradition, used originally by analogy, turns out *by coincidence* to correspond to a law which can be applied to material reality.

Pauli makes two other important points about the Kepler-Fludd dispute. The first is that Kepler in his image of the sphere is describing a movement of extraversion, in which the centre is projected into the material world, and secondly that it is entirely based on the number three, which Kepler suggests produces the world of the three dimensions. It is a scheme in which so far time, the fourth dimension, plays no part, and it is also, Pauli points out, in Jungian terms an imperfect number. The fourth is missing. Fludd saw it in the same

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 118f., 129f.

<sup>32</sup> Fludd also made use of the story and the proportions in his illustration of the 'temple of music'.

<sup>33</sup> For a fascinating discussion of the idea of musical harmony underlying the universe, from the discovery of the inadequacy of the Pythagorean scale, the 'just intonation' introduced by Zarlino which provided the ground for Kepler's and Newton's proportions, to the 'Harmonie Universelle' of Mersenne, and finally Hooke's theories on music and colour, which led to Newton's own scale based on minute mathematical divisions, and this seven-tone scale and a seven-colour spectrum corresponding to seven planets, see Penelope Gouk, 'The Harmonic Roots of Newtonian Science' in Fauvel, Flood, Shortland & Wilson (Eds.), *Let Newton Be*, pp. 100-125. In this context it should also be noted that Michael Meier's *Atalanta Fugiens* also associates musical forms (fugues) with the pursuit of the secret wisdom of nature (see Hildemarie Streich, 'Musikalische

way, and countered with a detailed defence of the quaternity<sup>34</sup> in which the Gnostic / Hermetic view of material as the fourth is embedded. Fludd also objected to the idea of division as far as the nature of God was concerned, and to the idea that the human spirit could be a *part* of anything, as for him it formed a microcosm of the universal unity. Fludd sees the universal proportions — and a key to the diverse unity constituting God, the universe and the alchemical process — in the figure of the Monas developed by John Dee.<sup>35</sup>

From this moment on, as has been observed by diverse commentators, there is a fundamental shift in the nature of knowledge. McKeon, in his celebrated lectures and seminars *On Knowing*, points out how this is caused not by any change in circumstances but merely by a change in the point of view. For example, where Plato uses a universal method of assimilation to show how knowledge can be assimilated to the ideas which are pre-existent, or Aristotle constructs the world from irreducible elements, which takes the knowable as fundamental, Galileo begins with the knower and uses an operational method of discrimination in which the causes of things can be left out in favour of the relationships between them. This automatically privileges material reality and the external world. McKeon concludes: "Therefore it is not the advance of science which has demonstrated that causes are an unnecessary dynamic, it's merely the mode of analysis which you choose."<sup>36</sup> This, combined with the principle of the particular over the universal (what McKeon terms logistic and problematic methods), leads to the idea that nature can be conquered and manipulated in the same way as (by analogy) simultaneously the world is being discovered and exploited by the European powers. In each case the results will provide the justification. Programatically, Bacon asserts: "the legitimate goal of science is the endowment of human life with new inventions and riches."<sup>37</sup> Empirical science will be used to make the dream of the

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und psychologische Entsprechungen in der *Atalanta Fugiens* von Michael Maier', *Eranos* 42, 1973, pp. 361-426)

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Pauli, 'Der Einfluß archetypischer Vorstellungen auf die Bildung naturwissenschaftlicher Theorien bei Kepler', in Jung & Pauli, *Naturerklärung und Psyche*, pp. 181-191

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 188ff. For Dee's Monas, see the note on p. 49 as well as Josten, 'A Translation of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*', *Ambix* 12, 1964, pp. 84-221, Walton, 'John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*, Geometrical Cabala', *Ambix* 23 (2), 1976, and Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, pp. 75-142.

<sup>36</sup> McKeon, *On Knowing*, p. 143

<sup>37</sup> Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, p. 11



manipulation of nature a reality,<sup>38</sup> and this will run parallel with a project of empire, which Bacon specifically recommends.<sup>39</sup> The rewards in terms of material dividends and colonial wealth will be enough to silence criticism, as imagination is forced into a subordinate role. For a time it will indeed appear that everything can be known and the secrets of the universe, like the white spaces on the map, be tamed to submission.

Bacon himself makes that clear in his own attack on the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition, which is also adumbrated in gendered terms. In 'The Masculine Birth of Time' he writes:

My intention is to impart to you, not the figments of my own brain, nor the shadows thrown by words, nor a mixture of religion and science, nor a few commonplace observations or notorious experiments tricked out to make a composition as fanciful as a stage-play. No: I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave.<sup>40</sup>

The image of the domination of a female slave needs little comment. Bacon makes it clear that this will be done by uniting "with things themselves in a chaste, holy, and legal wedlock" to create "a blessed race of Heroes or Supermen".<sup>41</sup> The ascendancy of Faustian masculine values is complete.

Bacon's project is an increase of science for the purpose of dominating and manipulating reality. This does not differ from the fundamental intention of magic, but whereas the Magus knows that his powers depend on a harmony within the totality of his own personality harmonizing in turn with the cosmos, science is one-sidedly dependent on rational thought and, because mechanistic, it is in many ways less demanding. Contextualizing Bacon, Lewis Mumford sees him within a tradition of mechanizing philosophers which includes Hobbes, Descartes and Comenius; he stresses the way in which science and technology enter a new and fruitful partnership:

Though Bacon flourished before Descartes, he made the working partnership between science and technics an even more binding one, by linking it to the immediate human desires for health, wealth and power.<sup>42</sup>

Although this could be read as somewhat ambiguous, as Mumford only gradually moved towards a more sceptical view of the project of the machine and the scientific / material

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<sup>38</sup> At this point the mystic journey of the imagination into the world of the stars, which is the basis of Ficino's astral magic, becomes the imagined real journey to the material moon in Kepler's *Somnium*, proto-science-fiction.

<sup>39</sup> e.g. 'De Augmentis Scientiarum', Book 8, Ch. 3 in Bacon (ed. Spedding, Ellis & Heath), *Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 78-88

<sup>40</sup> Bacon, 'The Masculine Birth of Time', in Farrington, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon*, p. 62

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 72

<sup>42</sup> Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, p. 106

civilization that we term 'western', and he was also trying to boost Bacon's reputation against denigrators of his rather primitive conceptualization of the scientific method, Mumford does conclude that Bacon's aphorism that 'knowledge is power' led directly towards an even more clearly Faustian project: what Mumford terms the 'myth of the machine':

First: he who creates a perfect automaton is in fact creating life, since, according to mechanistic doctrine, there is no essential difference between living organisms and machines, provided that they work. Even such a percipient and sensitive mind as that of Norbert Wiener came increasingly to endow his Golem with the ultimate properties of life. But, second, beneath this magic wish was a more insidiously flattering idea: *he who creates life is a God*.<sup>43</sup>

The allusion to Frankenstein's monster accords with the cultural critic Theodore Roszak's attribution to Bacon of a central role in the totalizing project of 'single vision' through the impersonal 'dead' eye of scientific knowing which predicates a system of natural laws, independent of human influence but susceptible to use by an elite who will be responsible for the "assault upon humanity and the rape of the environment that would follow from an unrestricted application of the objective mode of consciousness to the whole of human experience".<sup>44</sup> Not that this was Bacon's intention, Roszak grants, but the nature of the Faustian bargain is that its consequences are not fully known. Roszak refers to the new attitude to the material world as 'idolatry':

But desacralized nature, *our* nature, lacking sacramental transparency, *has* become an idol, an objectivized reality, the *only* reality. One need only ponder what people mean in our time when they counsel us to "be realistic". They mean, at every point, to forgo the claims of transcendence, to spurn the music of imaginative wonder, to regard the world as *nothing but* what the hard facts and quantitative abstractions of scientific objectivity make it out to be.<sup>45</sup>

Roszak, significantly, contrasts this not with a conventional religiosity — he indeed stresses how easily it sits with Protestant religion in particular — but with what he calls the 'Old Gnosis', the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.<sup>46</sup>

Roszak has borrowed the concept of idolatry with reference to technology from Marshall McLuhan, who pointed out that "the Psalmist insists that the *beholding* of idols, or the use of technology, conforms men to them".<sup>47</sup> Perhaps because of his butterfly tendency to flit from idea to idea, McLuhan's popularity has waned and his central insights into technology

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 125

<sup>44</sup> Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, p. 156

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 124 (author's emphases)

<sup>46</sup> See Ch. 7



and the media are all but forgotten, and yet they are essential if we wish to shed light on the central Faustian paradox: how it is that Faustus is able to lose his soul in exchange for the tricks of technology without even noticing what is happening. To understand this, McLuhan offers two principles. First, that "the medium is the message", and second, that the history of technology is the history of the projection and exteriorization of the human faculties. The first point, often misunderstood, is not a demand for the acceptance of the latest media or an epitaph on old technologies regarded as outdated, such as books. It simply makes the point that many people's understanding of media is incorrect: "Many people would be disposed to say that it was not the machine, but what one did with the machine, that was its meaning or message."<sup>48</sup> In other words they would argue that what was on television, whether the programmes were good or bad, was the most important factor in judging the effects of its use. McLuhan uses the example of electric light to show that this is typical of our blindness towards media. Electric light, unless it is used in advertising, is a medium without a message, but it has the most profound effect on how life is lived. With electric light, day and night are abolished, or come totally under human control. The truth of this can only be experienced in power cuts or if one journeys to remote places without an electricity supply, where the hours of daylight are absolute constraints on certain types of work. The point he is making is that we are usually quite unaware of the effect of a medium or technology until it is too late to reverse it. Although McLuhan's reasons for dividing media into categories of 'hot' (e.g. radio and film) and 'cool' (e.g. television) are far from convincing, his hypothesis that dictators need 'hot' media to survive has been strikingly borne out in practice.

As far as McLuhan's second point is concerned, he uses the Narcissus myth to show "that men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves".<sup>49</sup> We here recognize the Gnostic creation myth, and the source of Faustus' fall. By technologies, human beings have first extended their physical faculties (the road and wheel as extensions of the legs, weapons as extensions of the arms, etc.), but the extension,

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<sup>47</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 55 (author's emphasis)

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51

paradoxically, is also an amputation which precludes self-recognition. The final stage of this process, according to McLuhan, is particularly dangerous:

With the arrival of electric technology, man extended, or set outside himself, a live model of the central nervous system itself. To the degree that this is so, it is a development that suggests a desperate and suicidal autoamputation, as if the central nervous system could no longer depend on the physical organs to be protective buffers against the slings and arrows of outrageous mechanism. It could well be that the successive mechanizations of the various physical organs since the invention of printing have made too violent and superstimulated a social experience for the central nervous system to endure.<sup>50</sup>

If McLuhan reveals a connection between the fate of Faustus and Johann Fust with his role in the invention of printing, the process whereby Faustus becomes fascinated by the material world is illuminated by Brian Vickers in his survey of the emergence of a truly scientific attitude from the magical philosophy of the Renaissance. Vickers perceptively isolates one fundamental factor: the use of analogy. The philosophers of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition — he concentrates on Paracelsus and those, like Fludd, who broadly support his views — take a pre-existent image of the world and see how harmonies and connections can be traced to all the individual parts of creation. In particular, the human being as the microcosm in the exact image of the macrocosm of the universe is regarded as if the image were identity. The heart is not merely *like* the sun, it *is* the sun, and therefore 'will share all its other characteristics with the sun. Vickers argues convincingly that the root of the 'problem' lies in two contradictory ways of seeing language. To illustrate them he draws on Saussure's distinction between signifier and signified:

... the difference between the occultists and the experimentalists is the difference between the Neoplatonists and Saussure: on the one hand, a natural language in which words embody things in a real equation of signified and signifier to form a magic object; and on the other, a language where the connection between signified and signifier is arbitrary, socially given.<sup>51</sup>

The occultists, says Vickers, were also breaking with Aristotle by denying that metaphor is a mere mental convention, implying an area of difference as well as one of similarity. Instead of being fanciful arts meant to charm the hearer, metaphors move closer to symbol, in which "a process of substitution takes place, object can become symbol, or symbol object".<sup>52</sup> Through this metonymic connection, both terms achieve equal status, so either may be applied for the other. He cites Walker in making the potential of this view clear: "A

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 53

<sup>51</sup> Vickers, 'Analogy Versus Identity: the Rejection of Occult Symbolism, 1580-1680' in Vickers (Ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, p. 135



formula of words, therefore, may not only be an adequate substitute for the things denoted, but may even be more powerful."<sup>53</sup>

So far Vickers is right. This is the basis of Ficino's magic, founded on symbolism, continuity and affinity, so that an idea in the divine intellect is reflected through numbers, proportions and linguistic symbolism in the material world, which means that the image takes on the power of the spiritual essence. This is the point of his correspondences between music, planet gods and the divine intellect. It is clear that such powerful connections will lead to confusion and what Vickers describes as "progressive reification of the immaterial", in fact precisely the Faustian crux. The Gnostic / Hermetic tradition saw the possibilities of manipulating material reality because the human imagination, sharing divinity, had actually helped to create it, and then fallen in love with its own creation. In other words, material reality was at the same time a product of the imagination and separate from it. This tradition then developed magical methods to influence it, but gradually, seeking to make it subservient to the conscious mind, turned to the methods of consciousness: division, categorization and measurement. So, moving from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, the methods of the conscious mind are applied increasingly to the discoveries of the unconscious, gradually colonizing and subduing it.

One can, following Vickers, trace this campaign through the objections which were raised against the magical tradition from Paracelsus' time onwards, beginning with writers like Erastus and Libavius. Libavius attacked the Paracelsian collapsing of the distinction between the immaterial and the material (*on kai me on*) as an attack on the divine monopoly on power. The material world was founded on the laws of cause and effect:

True knowledge resides in an understanding of the specific, inherent, and immovable causes of things, which causes are comprehended by scientific definitions and principles arrived at by reason and experience and confirmed by the judgement and experience of scholars.<sup>54</sup>

Subsequent thinkers stressed the necessary distinction between signifier and signified. Galileo and others poured scorn on the idea that you could change things by merely naming them differently, and Bacon in the *Novum Organum* discusses the difference between the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 120

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 119

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 135

Ideas of the divine (reality) and fallible human imaginings.<sup>55</sup> Hobbes, who was Bacon's amanuensis, stresses the necessity of distinguishing language from reality. In his view words are taken at pleasure to serve for marks to recall a thought. Locke speaks in the same vein about the man who has:

imagined to himself Substances such as have never been, and fill'd his head with *Ideas* which have not any correspondence with the real Nature of Things, to which yet he gives settled and defined Names, may fill his Discourse and, perhaps, another Man's Head, with fantastical Imaginations of his own Brain; but will be very far from advancing thereby one jot in real and true Knowledge.<sup>56</sup>

Vickers examines other works by opponents of the Paracelsians, like Sennert, Van Helmont and Kepler, and shows that, though they still believe in a cosmos coloured by the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition in which analogies of a microcosm are possible and angelic powers, as well as God, have a real existence, that existence is separated both from material reality and from the human mind. Sennert insists on distinctions being made between words used by convention to express things in the mind, and matter and the forces acting upon it. Vickers shows the proximity of these ideas to those of Galileo and Descartes: "Hence we may gather that the Analogie of the great and little World is extended too large by the Chymists, because they make not an Analogie, but an identity, or the same thing."<sup>57</sup> Sennert also claims that the Paracelsians are moving from the unknown to the unknowable. He appeals for clarity of definition, consistency of terminology, and avoidance of confusion of discrete levels of reality.

Van Helmont, Vickers continues, also insists that metaphors are constructs of human imagination, not subjects in the physical world. He attacks the idea that a human being, as a microcosm, should contain all creation (mountains, stones, plants, fishes, beasts, tempests, diseases) as it would reduce humanity to the level of imperfect material and posit human fiction as law. Vickers paraphrases Van Helmont in saying: "Rhetorical tropes [...] are suitable for works of the imagination, but not for research on which human life depends."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> In the *Novum Organum* Bacon details his four 'Idols', the Idols of the Tribe (a false anthropomorphism), the Idols of the Cave (the contamination of the imagination by the emotions, character and education), the Idols of the Market Place (social exchange) and the Idols of the Theatre (from philosophies and traditions of thought). (Bacon (ed. Spedding, Ellis & Heath), *Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 53ff.) The power of knowledge can only come from knowing the laws of cause and effect. (Ibid., p. 47)

<sup>56</sup> Vickers, 'Analogy Versus Identity: the Rejection of Occult Symbolism, 1580-1680' in Vickers (Ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, pp. 113f.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 141

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 148



Kepler's analogies, according to Vickers, remain judicious and limited "to provide models that can be tested for their explanatory and predictive usefulness".<sup>59</sup> In the last analysis, the knowable is the measurable.

Vickers regards empiricism and the scientific method as unquestionably desirable. It is clear from his tone, for instance in describing Sennert's appeal for clarity as 'remarkably modern', that he approves of the advance towards 'true science', since it excludes the danger inherent in analogy of transforming things into what they are not. Interestingly enough, he draws parallels between the occult mentalities and the beliefs held in 'traditional societies', such as those in Africa, that there is a unique and intimate link between words and things and that to manipulate words is to have the same power over the things they stand for, an idea deriving from numerous creation myths in which the world is spoken or sung into existence, which is dismissed by traditional science because it would imply that reality did not exist independently of language.

The voices of those like Fludd, who believed in the reality of the connection between macrocosm and microcosm, or like Paracelsus, for whom the identity between observer and observed allowed alchemical changes in the external world to be reflected in the soul and *vice versa*, or like Böhme, whose belief in an Adamic 'Sprache der Natur' could reveal the central mysteries connecting God and the creation, or like Croll, who saw figures of speech as "the very fabric and glue of the universe and the means by which it spoke"<sup>60</sup> became increasingly isolated and were driven underground in the triumph of the 'single vision' Blake was to castigate.<sup>61</sup>

Although it is an oversimplification, Vickers' thesis allows us to distinguish two approaches to language as emblematic, if not symptomatic, of the split that has occurred. It chimes in with Foucault's analysis in *Les Mots et les Choses*<sup>62</sup> that empirical science,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 151

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 135

<sup>61</sup> The extent to which even the artistic representation of the spiritual world degenerated after Shakespeare by reification and degradation to a mere department of the material becomes clear in a little book by Montfaucon de Villars, which appeared in 1670 entitled *Le Comte de Gabalis ou Entretiens sur les sciences secrètes*. The name Gabalis is presumably drawn from the Paracelsan spelling of Kabala: 'ars Gabalistica'. In this work the spirits of the Paracelsan world, salamanders, sylphs, nymphs and gnomes, representing the four elements, are portrayed as seeking to copulate with humans to obtain souls in exchange for immortality. Designed to provoke ridicule, the book was well enough known to be mentioned with the Rosicrucians in the dedication of Pope's 'Rape of the Lock', and reappears in an allusion by E. T. A. Hoffmann in 1814.

<sup>62</sup> See Ch. 9.

supporting technology, requires language to represent the world of material things, ideas and processes as unambiguously as possible. The language of analogy and metonymy, from this rationalist perspective, can be little more than embellishment of a mimesis privileging 'reality'. Over against this the primacy of the imagination, using imagery as its source and establishing connections and creating energy through metonymy and symbolism, is exiled to the realm of creative art, the irrational, and madness. Thus two separate traditions develop, characterized by C.P. Snow as Two Cultures, which can be traced clearly enough through the intervening centuries.

It would go far beyond the scope of this thesis to do more than indicate the connections. Though the history of science and philosophy is well documented, there is a surprisingly small body of scholarship pointing out the connections on the imaginative side, partly because such diachronic studies do not fit neatly into academic categories, and partly because the connections run underground, in areas that are not always taken seriously. The researcher sometimes feels like the protagonists of Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* or Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, both of which, in different ways, deal with the subject. Both also perform the valuable function of warning against the paranoia of searching for organized underground movements or secret societies and stress the often chimerical nature of the quest. Yet, I believe, the comparative approach can shed light on what might look like unmotivated irruptions into an otherwise orthodox pattern.

As has been shown by Frances Yates,<sup>63</sup> Fludd's and Meier's syntheses of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition are the dominating influence behind the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz* (1614), an alchemical allegory by Johann Valentin Andreae, and the so-called 'Rosicrucian Manifestos' (1614 & 1615), which caused a considerable stir in the revolutionary years preceding the Thirty Years' War.<sup>64</sup> Rosicrucian pamphlets and emblems,

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<sup>63</sup> in *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*

<sup>64</sup> The authorship of the original Rosicrucian Manifestos, the 'Fama Fraternitas' and the 'Confessio', has still not been established beyond doubt. In a seminar in 1986 (Janssen F.A. (ed), *Das Erbe des Christian Rosenkreuz* (Vorträge anlässlich des Amsterdamer Symposiums 18-20 November 1986) Johann Valentin Andreae 1586-1986 und die Manifeste der Rosenkreuzerbruderschaft 1614-1616) not all the participants were convinced that they could not have come from the pen of Andreae or the circle of his friends. The objection of Montgomery to assimilating Andreae to the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition in the *Chymical Wedding* on the grounds that he is trying to regain alchemy for the orthodox Lutherans must be taken seriously, and his distinction (p. 165) between the two traditions: that Gnostic / Hermetic mechanism of salvation is through human works where Lutheranism accepts only grace through faith is undoubtedly correct. However, when he



including the *Chymical Wedding*, made use of Dee's 'Monas', which, it was suggested above, Fludd took as symbolic of the unity of the cosmos.<sup>65</sup> Yates suggests that the idea of a secret brotherhood of initiates led in two directions: the formation of learned societies in a Baconian tradition to press forward the empirical and technological project, and a 'secret' tradition of occult knowledge running counter to religious, political or cultural orthodoxy. Even if there was no secret society at the time of the Rosicrucian furore, there was certainly one at a later stage using the Monas and propagating the Gnostic / Hermetic ideas.

Yates' study has the merit of setting the history of Rosicrucian ideas against the cataclysm of the Thirty Years' War.<sup>66</sup> By 1650 and the end of the war, the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition was discredited; the process which had begun with the dating of the *Corpus Hermeticum* by Isaac Casauban in 1614<sup>67</sup> continued with the attacks by Mersenne in the *Quaestiones in Genesim* (1623).<sup>68</sup> Dee's reputation was effectively destroyed by the publication of his *Spiritual Diary* by Meric Casauban in 1659.<sup>69</sup> The intellectual climate was moving against the feverish occultism of the early 17th century and towards empiricism. The Rosicrucian ideals of a society dedicated to knowledge controlled by a Magus-like elite are taken up in the form of utopian visions like Bacon's (*The New Atlantis*), Andreae's (*Chritianopolis*), or seen with disillusion in Comenius' anti-utopia *The Labyrinth of the World*.<sup>70</sup> So when the Royal Society which Bacon had foreseen and Comenius had urged was at last founded in 1660, the members were careful to distance themselves from any implication of taint from the Rosicrucians or from the 'Invisible College' whose meetings may have been its forerunners.<sup>71</sup>

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then maintains that the *Chymical Wedding* is an expression of Lutheran alchemy, this seems a contradiction in terms, as alchemy is by definition an attempt to change the status of things as they are by human manipulation.

<sup>65</sup> Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, pp. 61-69. Yates also traces the connections through the publisher Theodore de Bry, who had published Harriot's work on Virginia and went on to publish Fludd's lavishly illustrated works and Meier's *Atalanta Fugiens* using engravings made by the Swiss artist and map-maker Matthäus Merian.

<sup>66</sup> Although her attempt to relate the Rosicrucian movement directly to Friedrich and the fortunes of the Palatinate lacks substantiating evidence, she underlines that during and after the "unmitigated catastrophe" (Wedgewood, *The Thrity Years War*, p. 525) that befell Europe intellectual life was disrupted and stultified by physical danger and the reimposition of orthodoxy.

<sup>67</sup> Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 398-403

<sup>68</sup> Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, pp. 111f.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161-9

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-92

Yet among the foundation members of the Royal Society was Elias Ashmole, whose vast manuscript collection of alchemical works and library of Gnostic / Hermetic books testify to a thriving underground tradition,<sup>72</sup> and Ashmole was also admitted to a Freemasons' Lodge in 1646, which was already in existence at that time.<sup>73</sup> Freemasonry, with its number symbolism and stress on geometrical arcana, is closely related to the Rosicrucian tradition, and Masonic claims to derive their mysteries from the secrets of the Great Pyramid and Solomon's Temple are reminiscent of the Gnostic / Hermetic connections with near Eastern mythology and the Jewish Kabala.<sup>74</sup> There seems to be strong evidence that alchemical and overtly Gnostic / Hermetic works continued to circulate among friends and acquaintances with similar interests much as *samizdat* publications became current in late 20th century Eastern Europe,<sup>75</sup> and it was from the ranks of Freemasonry that the occult revival of the late 19th century drew its members, as will subsequently be made clear.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> McLean discusses similar uses of collections of 'secret studies', like that of Sir George Erskine or Sir Robert Moray, like Ashmole a founding member of the Royal Society and a Freemason, Janssen F.A. (ed), *Das Erbe des Christian Rosenkreuz*, pp. 170-9

<sup>73</sup> Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p. 210

<sup>74</sup> Dobbs and Jacob argue that these interests were given intellectual respectability by the posthumous publication of Newton's *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Emended* and she associates Newtonians with the rapid growth in Freemasonry in the 18th century, Dobbs & Jacob, *Newton and the Culture of Newtonianism*, pp. 103f.

<sup>75</sup> See Richard Westfall's commentary on Newton's alchemical papers in 'Newton and Alchemy', in Vickers (Ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, pp. 317-21.

<sup>76</sup> Martha Schuchard, in her 1975 dissertation *Freemasonry, Secret Societies, and the Continuity of the Occult Traditions in English Literature*, argues for a greater role for Freemasonry in the works of Blake and Yeats than many commentators would be prepared to grant. She follows many of the connections outlined in this chapter, though my interpretation of them, arrived at independently, lays somewhat less stress on the role of secret societies.



## Chapter Five

### Rationality and Romanticism: Newton and Blake

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The schizophrenia of the age, with its rational and empirical surface and its underground occult currents, is exemplified in the figure of Newton. The 'official' Newton, whose investigation of the laws of causality seemed to signal the approaching 'end of physics', prompted Pope's famously ironic epitaph:

Nature and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night:  
God said, *Let Newton be!* and all was *Light*.

Newton's published work on optics, on motion and gravity, and his fluxions (calculus) were the monument to an assiduously cultivated reputation in empirical science with its roots in mechanism, which had been since the triumph of Descartes the only acceptable scheme of causation. Newton of course opposed Descartes, and went far beyond mechanism in his idea of a force operating over a distance, but the *Principia* when it was finally published with its meticulous calculations and faultless reasoning proved to be the unassailable basis of his fame.

It was a fame that grew rapidly; Voltaire noted, having observed Newton's funeral in Westminster Abbey in 1727, "He was buried like a king who had done well by his subjects."<sup>1</sup> By 1837 Newton's reputation had grown rather than diminished. William Whewell described Newton as "altogether without a rival or neighbour", his work on gravity "indisputably and incomparably the greatest scientific study ever made."<sup>2</sup> Stephen Hawking and Werner Israel still believe that "Newton's theory will never be outmoded. Designed to predict the motions of the heavenly bodies, it does its job with unbelievable accuracy..."<sup>3</sup> Though Hawking is no admirer of Newton as a person — "Isaac Newton was not a pleasant

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<sup>1</sup> Fauvel, Flood, Shortland & Wilson (eds.), *Let Newton Be*, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 27

man." — he calls the *Principia* "surely the most influential book ever written in physics".<sup>4</sup>

Hawking recognizes that in integrating motion into the scheme of the universe Newton introduces the importance of time to what had appeared a static pattern, and laid the foundations of relativity.

What was celebrated in Newton was not only his discoveries but also the principles of science themselves: this framework of 'law'<sup>5</sup> was able to impose order on the material world and free it from the contamination of the psyche. Newton had appeared, wrote Richard Oakley, and

in orient beauty bright,  
He rose, and brought the world's dark laws to light<sup>6</sup>

A rainbow prompted another poet, James Thomson, to write:

How just, how beauteous the refractive law. .

Not that the knowledge such laws conferred would make the rainbow any more beautiful, but it would achieve two other important tasks. Firstly, it would confirm the hierarchical European conception of the status quo, as became the thinly veiled programme of many Newtonians: "The task of clergymen like Bentley became to find explanations for order, hierarchy, and human authority that made lawfulness seem to be in the very nature of the universe."<sup>7</sup> Secondly, it would enable human beings to dominate and manipulate the material world, as Bacon had foreseen. It was this combination of the rational perception of the world and its exploitation which led Blake to write:

For Bacon and Newton, sheath'd in dismal steel, their terrors hang  
Like iron scourges over Albion: Reasonings like vast Serpents  
Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations.

I turn my eyes to the Schools and Universities of Europe  
And there behold the Loom of Locke, whose Woof rages dire,  
Wash'd by the Water-wheels of Newton: black the cloth  
In heavy wreaths folds over every Nation: cruel Worlds  
Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic  
Moving by compulsion each other, not as those in Eden, which,  
Wheel within Wheel, in freedom revolve in harmony and peace.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> S. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, p. 199

<sup>5</sup> See discussion on p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Fauvel, Flood, Shortland & Wilson (eds.), *Let Newton Be*, p. 28

<sup>7</sup> Dobbs & Jacob, *Newton and the Culture of Newtonianism*, p. 69

<sup>8</sup> 'Jerusalem' 15, 11-20, in Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. Keynes, pp. 635f. (K in subsequent references)



Blake's attack was on Newtonianism rather than Newton, on a reductionist mentality and limited form of perception which, ironically enough, did not apply to Newton the thinker himself. But Blake could not at the time have known how much further Newton's range of interests extended.

What emerges from Newton's biography is a deeply neurotic man whose desire for perfection turned the slightest criticism into a wounding attack. The response to reservations about some aspects of his work on optics began a pattern which made it remarkable that the *Principia* ever came to publication in his lifetime. He had to be wooed, bullied and cajoled into parting with manuscripts which were reworked and revised until the original decisions to go ahead were reversed, and the process began again. This in turn resulted in acrimonious disputes like the one with Leibniz about who had invented calculus first, simply because Newton had never published his work on 'fluxions'. Projects that might have been more susceptible to general criticism because they ran counter to accepted trends of thought, or which could not be given QED proofs, remained completely hidden, as happened in the case of his alchemical studies. Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs maintains that Newton went beyond the chemical interests of his contemporaries Boyle and Hartlib "to probe the whole vast literature of the older alchemy as it has never been probed before or since."<sup>9</sup> Newton's reading covers books and manuscripts from the most varied sources and periods, up to and including the 'Rosicrucian' writers.<sup>10</sup> In view of this broad spectrum of reading, Dobbs criticizes Yates for suggesting that there was a Rosicrucian influence on Newton, but the previous chapters should have served to make clear that the connection in the context of Gnostic / Hermetic ideas does indeed exist, and this would allow Newton's unorthodox religious stance to relate to the scheme more easily.<sup>11</sup>

Though Newton's alchemy may have resulted from a desire to find an underlying unifying principle within the universe, and may, as has been suggested by Dobbs, Westfall

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<sup>9</sup> Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy*, p. 38

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 21ff.

<sup>11</sup> Newton was famously unable to subscribe to orthodox Anglican doctrine, particularly on the Trinity. Although this is not a specifically Gnostic / Hermetic heresy, there are important links between them, and Dobbs herself notes that Newton's Cambridge mathematics instructor Isaac Barrow had a high regard for the Hermetic tradition. Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy*, pp. 95ff.

and others, have prompted the idea of non-mechanical forces operating over a distance,<sup>12</sup> it is clear from the evidence of his painstaking work in his Cambridge laboratory that Newton tried to perform as many of the alchemical operations he had read about as possible. Dobbs charts some of Newton's experiments as they are revealed by the manuscripts,<sup>13</sup> beginning with the attempt to extract the Mercurius from metals. What becomes clear in these papers is the tendency which has been traced throughout this section to reify principles which, with their strange allusive nomenclature (the green lion, Jupiter flying on his eagle), had previously remained ambiguously suspended between material and spiritual, and to try to describe them in tangible chemical terms.

When Newton's alchemical papers were discovered by his 19th century biographer they caused consternation. Brewster, although too honest to pretend they did not exist, confessed that he was baffled how Newton could concern himself with "the most contemptible alchemical poetry".<sup>14</sup> In a later biography More tried to dismiss them as Newton's method of relaxation; in fact John Maynard Keynes was the first to suggest Newton's role as a 'magician' attempting to solve a riddle in "a sort of philosopher's treasure hunt to the esoteric brotherhood."<sup>15</sup> Despite the incontrovertible weight of evidence that Newton's alchemy was important to him,<sup>16</sup> attempts to suggest that alchemy was an unfortunate aberration have persisted. A review of Michael White's biography *The Last Sorcerer* in *The Times*<sup>17</sup> speaks of Newton's "sinister experiments with the occult" and of a "less reputable private life" in which Newton was "addicted to books about magic, which were secretly imported from the continent." Clearly a significant portion of the scientific community and of the wider general public have great difficulty in coming to terms with this side of Newton's studies. It has sometimes been suggested, for example, that alchemy was an early interest superseded by

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<sup>12</sup> Westfall, 'Newton and Alchemy' in *Let Newton Be*, p. 33. See also Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy*, pp. 149f. on the 'star of antimony'.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 134-186

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 14

<sup>16</sup> Westfall gives a count of 1,200,000 words written by Newton on alchemy)

<sup>17</sup> *The Times*, 4 December 1995



the serious scientific work,<sup>18</sup> or that the alchemy was associated with the period of Newton's nervous breakdown of 1693. In fact neither of these theories stands up, as, according to Dobbs and Westfall, the alchemical papers span a period from the 1660s to the 1690s, exactly the time of the elaboration of the optical work and the *Principia*. What is interesting is the fact that alchemy plays little part in Newton's life after the breakdown of 1693, the symptoms of which emerge in two confused and desperate letters written that September to Pepys and Locke.<sup>19</sup>

Westfall, as a discreet and conscientious biographer, remains silent beyond the horizon of what can be known, but describes this period in conjunction with Newton's relations with a young Swiss mathematician, Nicolas Fatio de Duillier (whom he had probably met in 1689). The inference can clearly be drawn that an increasing euphoria in Newton's notes on his alchemical experiments, culminating in the (unpublished) essay 'Praxis', which uses alchemical symbolism, glossed with prosaic chemical terms, to show how the Philosopher's Stone could be made and used with mercury in the projection and multiplication of gold, coincided with a crisis and subsequent rupture in relations with Fatio that bear all the hallmarks of a deep erotic attachment.<sup>20</sup> This interesting coincidence is compounded by the fact that after 1693 Newton not only abandoned his alchemical work, he also quit Cambridge for London, where he took charge of the Mint, substituting 'real' gold for the philosophical variety, and establishing his reputation as a bitter persecutor of coiners, several of whom were hanged at his instigation, and as a fearsome and egotistical defender of his scientific status. The assaying of gold by scientific methods rather than with the Lydian stone favoured by alchemists was one of Newton's responsibilities at the mint. A reliable gold currency, defended against the 'clippers' by its clear boundary stamped with the words '*decus et*

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<sup>18</sup> For instance an article in the Cambridge alumni magazine *Cam*, Michaelmas 1995, written by the editor, Peter Richards, insists: "For a decade thereafter he faltered, sidetracked by alchemy and theological disputation, his room littered with half-finished work. Only with the visit to Cambridge in 1684 of the astronomer Edmund Halley did the log jam shift... It was the spur Newton needed. Alchemy forgotten, between 1684 and 1686 he worked again at white heat, this time on his greatest achievement, the *Principia mathematica*..." (p. 14)

<sup>19</sup> Westfall, *Never at Rest*, p. 534

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 529-540

*tutamen*' was an essential foundation for the financing of the growing Empire and its basis in the Slave Trade.

Brewster, in his *Memoirs of Newton*,<sup>21</sup> leaves us with a haunting remark by which Newton is represented in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*:

I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.

This seashore should by now be familiar territory. We have discussed it in previous chapters as the seigniory of Faust, the border of the unconscious. So it is perhaps not surprising that it figures as the setting of the keys to Blake's objection to Newtonian rationalism.

In two letters to Thomas Butts, on 2 October and 22 November 1802, Blake explains in verse what lies behind his apparently idiosyncratic 'vision'. The first of these describes a 'Vision of Light' on the beach near Felpham. Under a brilliant sun the light appears to echo the grains of sand:

In particles bright  
The jewels of Light  
Distinct shone and clear.<sup>22</sup>

These 'minute particulars', which constitute the material world, are each individual and precious, and each corresponds to a human being:

For each was a Man  
Human-form'd.

They convey a message:

Saying: Each grain of Sand  
Every Stone on the Land,  
Each rock & each hill,  
Each fountain and rill,  
Each herb and each tree,  
Mountain, hill, earth & sea,  
Cloud, Meteor & Star  
Are Men Seen Afar.

Simultaneously expanding his vision to the universe and contracting it to the individual particle, which remains a living image of the human observer but apart from him, Blake penetrates the mystery of the Gnostic / Hermetic correspondence of macrocosm and microcosm.

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<sup>21</sup> Vol ii, Ch 27



Continuing the expansion, all these material particles, which are envisioned as individuals, merge into the single body of imagination:

My eyes more and more  
Like a sea without shore  
Continue expanding,  
The Heavens commanding,  
Till the Jewels of Light,  
Heavenly Men beaming bright,  
Appear'd as one Man

As announced by Pico della Mirandola, echoing the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the power of imagination is able to create and achieve identity with God, commanding the heavens. The One Man that emerges, a composite of every individual imagination and the world which is the medium of perception, is Adam Cadmon of the Cabala, the Anthropos of Gnostic myth who bears the divine image in an imperfect creation. The path to this vision is described in alchemical terms:

Like dross purg'd away  
All my mire and my clay.  
Soft consum'd in delight  
In his bosom Sun bright  
I remain'd

Northrop Frye is aware of the implication of this when he writes: "The ego plays with shadows like the men in Plato's cave; to perceive the particular and imagine the real is to perceive and imagine as part of a Divine Body."<sup>23</sup> To this idea he adds two corollaries:

One is that we perceive *as* God. "No man hath seen God at any time," because true perception is creation, and God cannot be created... The second is, that, as we cannot perceive anything higher than a man, nothing higher than Man can exist.<sup>24</sup>

Blake maintains the divinity of humanity through the creative imagination, which makes him a direct heir to the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.

Whether perception functions quite like Plato's cave is another matter. Blake takes up the cave image in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where the 'abyss' of the five senses allows egress from the skull to the world beyond:

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,  
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> K., p. 804.

<sup>23</sup> Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 32 (author's emphasis)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 32

<sup>25</sup> K., p. 150

Seeing, then, simultaneously, with the senses and the inner perceptivity of the imagination, opens the secret of the universe from the most humble object (and it will be recalled that such a process is entirely compatible with Morienus' definition of the alchemical work quoted on pp. 38f.):

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.<sup>26</sup>

As if Blake himself realized that more needed to be said about how such sight was to be achieved, he wrote a second letter elaborating what he means by 'double vision' in contrast to the 'single vision' he imputes to Newton. Again Blake begins with perceptions of nature: an autumnal mixture of slanting sun in a blue sky sometimes shaded by cloud. What is *not* happening is a mimetic recreation of external reality, a privileging of the material world. This is made clear in Blake's words in 'The Everlasting Gospel':

This life's dim Windows of the Soul  
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole  
And leads you to Believe a Lie  
When you see with, not thro', the Eye<sup>27</sup>

The perception of the material world instead becomes spiritualized and animated here by the 'Fairy elves' and 'little devils'<sup>28</sup> which grow until the landscape itself becomes part of a cosmic conflict within the poet's mind. To illustrate his meaning, Blake shows how a white-bearded thistle becomes an allegorical old Man:

For double the vision my Eyes do see,  
And a double vision is always with me.  
With my inward Eye 'tis an old Man grey;  
With my outward, a Thistle across my way.<sup>29</sup>

When the sun blazes out it is the Los of Blake's cosmology:

'Twas outward a sun: inward Los in his might.<sup>30</sup>

and the whole natural world becomes the metonymic expression within the poet's imaginative psyche, an example of the so-called 'pathetic fallacy', which can be seen as the Romantic movement's interpretation of the central alchemical principles set out in the *Tabula*

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<sup>26</sup> K., p. 431

<sup>27</sup> K., p. 753

<sup>28</sup> They recall the spirits Prospero calls on for aid in making his final charm.

<sup>29</sup> K., p. 817

<sup>30</sup> K., p. 818



*Smaragdina* that what is above is the same as what is below: in the poetic and imaginative process it is possible to unite macrocosm and microcosm through an image which overrides the distinctions of the law-governed material world (*on kai me on*), is accessible to human manipulation ("in the palm of your hand"), and escapes the bounds of time. So the sun of Los, the alchemical 'Sol', differs from the material sun:

Thou measurest not the time to me,  
Nor yet the Space that I do see;

At the conclusion of the poem Blake goes further:

Now I a fourfold vision see,  
And a fourfold vision is given to me;  
'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight  
And threefold in soft Beulah's night  
And twofold Always. May God us keep  
From Single vision and Newton's sleep!

These lines combine two complementary schemes: in one 'single vision' is conventional perception within the material world, which Blake traces back to Bacon and his demand for unambiguous language,<sup>31</sup> Locke's philosophy, and Newton's cosmology.<sup>32</sup> Double vision is the metonymic dimension just described. Vision is threefold under the influence of Beulah, Blake's name for the feminine state of emotional or numinous charge, an erotic immersion; while the stage of being fourfold is the total Gnostic vision beyond time and space where identity with the Divinity is achieved. The fourfold vision also means a totality composed of the four states: Ulro, the physical world that obeys the laws of causality and is

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<sup>31</sup> Frye notes in this connection a poet's objection to Baconian mimesis: "To the poet the word is a storm-center of meanings, sounds and associations, radiating out indefinitely like the ripples of a pool. It is precisely because of this indefiniteness that he writes poems. The poem is a unity of words in which these radiations have become the links of imaginative cohesion." (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 114) The reader will recall what was said earlier about *The Tempest*.

<sup>32</sup> Roszak writes: "As the brave ally of Tom Paine and the revolutionary forces of his time, Blake took second place to none in his hostility toward aristocratic privilege and capitalist oppression. But whom did he mark out as the prime antagonists of Poetic Genius and the Divine Vision? Not obvious villains and godless scoundrels — Blake wastes little time on easy targets. But Bacon, Newton, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Gibbon... the noblest spirits of Enlightenment and natural religion. It is with such giants that Blake tangles. Why? Because it is with them that the denaturing of visionary imagination begins. With them alienation initiates its climb to supreme virtue. In the name of Reason, Progress, Humanity — the total secularization of mind and energy". (*Where the Wasteland Ends*, pp. 413f.) Roszak traces how this single vision leads to "bomb physics and the human guinea pigs of Buchenwald emerging from the worldview of Newton and Pasteur, the behavioral reductionism of Watson and Skinner springing from the humane aspirations of Bacon and Locke, the Frankensteinian nightmares of modern science and technics arising from Promethean dreams of glory." (*Ibid.*, p. 414) Reason emptied of meaning is shown to lead to despair. "Single vision is despair: clever-minded despair." (*Ibid.*, p. 278) In that Void only arbitrary simulacra can achieve a brief power to distract. The imagination in Disneyland.

comprehensible through logical reasoning, Generation, the vegetative world of birth, copulation and death, Beulah, the realm of emotion and love, and Eden, in which the four 'Zoas' or living beings which power the chariot of God combine to form the mandala of the four-gated Holy City. There are striking analogies to be drawn here with Jung's quaternities of perception (sensation, judgement, logic and intuition), or his religious quaternity of Father, Son, Spirit and Devil. Jung was also to maintain that the goal of individuation (the alchemical process) was the integration of the personality in the fourfold Self.

The 'single vision' associated with Newton is the vision of Ulro, a precisely measurable but barren Satanic waste which is the creation of Urizen in the material world of time and space, within the 'Mundane Shell'. In 'The Gates of Paradise', Blake's version of the Temptation story, the emergence of the Mephistophelian principle through the four elements can be clearly observed:

Serpent Reasonings us entice  
Of Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice.  
Doubt Self Jealous, Wat'ry folly,  
Struggling thro' Earth's Melancholy.  
Naked in Air, in Shame and Fear,  
Blind in Fire with shield and spear,  
Two Horn'd Reasoning, Cloven Fiction,  
In Doubt, which is Self contradiction,  
A dark Hermaphrodite I stood,  
Rational Truth, Root of Evil and Good.  
Round me flew the Flaming Sword;  
Round her snowy Whirlwinds roar'd,  
Freezing her Veil, the Mundane Shell.<sup>33</sup>

Because reasoning is 'two-horned' and demands that the 'contraries' which Blake regarded as residing in all things be resolved into one pole or the other, the contraries become contradictions which 'freeze' the world. Single vision then substitutes minted coin for philosophical gold:

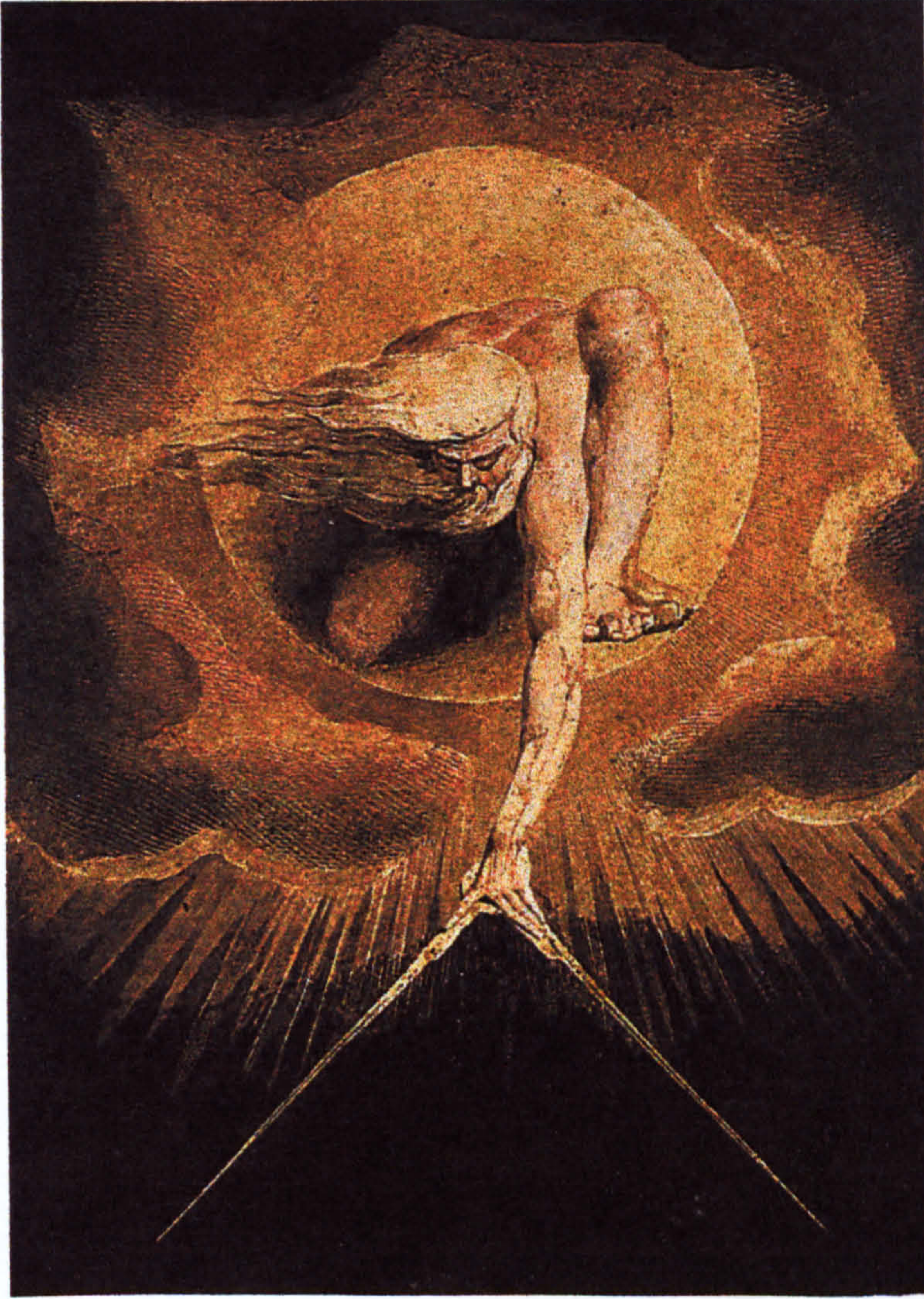
"When the sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?" Oh no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty.' I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> K., p. 770

<sup>34</sup> Blake, *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, K., p. 617





8. Blake, 'The Ancient of Days'

Commentators who have tried to fit the image of divinity which emerges from Blake's vision into a conventional Christian framework have signally failed to make sense of the contradiction between a human imagination which creates the world as the Divine Body of Anthropos / Christ and the creator of the world presented as the Old Testament 'Old Nobodaddy', who is Urizen, described in *A Vision of the Last Judgement* as "a very Cruel

Being"<sup>35</sup> Blake portrays such

a figure memorably in 'The Ancient of Days', (illustration) where the world creator is bent down almost to falling to "set a compass upon the face of the depth"<sup>36</sup> with his left (sinister) hand. The distinction between the divine essence and the Demiurge who creates the world is however familiar to us from Gnostic tradition, so it is interesting to read Henry Crabb Robinson's report:

On my obtaining from him the declaration that the Bible was the work of God, I referred to the commencement of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth." But I gained nothing by this, for I was triumphantly told that this God was not Jehovah, but the Elohim, & the doctrine of the Gnostics repeated with sufficient consistency to silence one so unlearned as myself<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> K., p. 617

<sup>36</sup> Proverbs 9, 27. It will be noted that in this text Wisdom is speaking of her presence before the creation of the world by the Creator.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Klonsky, *William Blake: the Seer and his Visions*, p. 29. Blake even produced a series of deceptively playful watercolours in 1798 illustrating Gray's 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat' as an



confirming Blake's evident familiarity with the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.<sup>38</sup>

The figure of 'The Ancient of Days', seen from the side, closely resembles the figure of



9. Blake, 'Newton'

Newton in one of Blake's most famous prints dating from 1795: Donald Ault<sup>39</sup> gives a detailed commentary on this picture stressing the contrasts between the indefinite subaqueous quality of the background and the sharp outlines of the figure of Newton and the drawing he is producing. The figure is positioned within the enigmatic sea of time and space but is part of it, crystallizing into three-dimensionality as though growing from the rock that partially

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allegory of the Gnostic Fall as described on pp. 30f. (reproduced in Klonsky, *William Blake: the Seer and his Visions*, pp. 88-93)

<sup>38</sup> Other references to Paracelsus and Hermes Trismegistus make it abundantly clear that Blake, though his vision may have arisen spontaneously, was aware of a tradition congenial to his ideas which he would have recognized as the antecedents of Swedenborg and Böhme, his first contacts with the occult tradition. It seems unnecessary to postulate a Neo-Platonic influence, as has been done by Kathleen Raine following George Mills Harper (Raine, *Blake and Antiquity*). Although Raine shows convincingly that Blake may have used elements from Neo-Platonism, which is after all closely related to the Gnostic / Hermetic line, the secularism of Neo-Platonic thought sits uneasily with Blake's profoundly religious sense of vision. The illustrations from *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem* also show a sympathetic knowledge of alchemical iconography. Schuchard also marshals considerable circumstantial evidence that Blake, through Masonic acquaintances, would have had access to much of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.



hides, for example, the left leg, while the rock he sits on seems itself to be formed into some weird fish's mouth by the muscular curve of the back and buttocks or the creased knee-pit between thigh and calf. As Ault points out, "It is the whole *composition* and not simply the human figure which is Blake's 'Newton'",<sup>40</sup> a fact which is emphasized by the echoes in composition between figure and background continued on into the two-dimensionality of the construction he is mapping on to the paper. The intricate play of triangles and arcs formed by his fingers, dividers and lines is further mystified by the spectrous veil falling from no obvious source in a parodic imitation of a left arm and outstretched finger to become part of the scroll itself, which in turn petrifies to a crudely three-dimensional fossil spiral throwing back the gaze to the proliferating polyps on the left. The effect of the picture, Ault notes, is "to reveal the extent to which the powerful imaginative body of the figure has been lured into a mathematical parody of itself."<sup>41</sup>

Newton is not demonized. Indeed Ault claims his face is "not unlike Blake's own", which has the effect of portraying the threat of the lure of Newtonian cosmology in its convincing plausibility as even more dangerous.<sup>42</sup> The figure coiling his powerful body into a position of rapt concentration on the immediate point by his own feet is close to falling, and can be seen actually to fall in a print from the same year of 'Nebuchadnezzar'. The same play of arcs and triangles



10. Blake, 'Nebuchadnezzar'

can be observed, confirming the relatedness of the pictures, but the figure's appalled and appalling animality contrasts with Newton's glowing intelligence, as the veil has mutated

<sup>39</sup> Ault, *Visionary Physics*, pp. 2ff.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 4 (author's emphasis)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 3



into the strangely flattened beard and the scroll into the clawed hand. The tentacles of matted hair on the body seem to be spreading into a mineral carapace, and the background, which in 'Newton' had glowed with a mysterious aura, now encloses the creeping form in a sombrely two-dimensional cave composed of the elements of lines and arcs in Newton's drawing.

Blake's interpretation of the fall of the Gnostic seeker will throw light on the enigmatic sentence quoted earlier from Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*,<sup>43</sup> and recall what was said about Faustus. First let us follow Ault's argument more closely about the 'lure' of the Newtonian system. Blake's poetics flow from the artistic premise that

the artistic imagination is not an imitation or reflection of external nature it was widely conceived to be in the eighteenth century; but rather external nature, in all its complexity, is a distorted imitation or usurpation of, and demonic substitution for, artistic imagination.<sup>44</sup>

Imagination does not reject the corporeal world, it is not in that sense dualistic, but envisions the material moment in the light of eternity, which, as Frye points out, is not the same as an indefinite extension of time, but an 'Eternal Now' of personal experience. Thus, according to Frye,

every act of the imagination, every such union of existence and perception, is a time-space complex, not time plus space, but time *times* space, so to speak, in which time and space as we know them disappear, as hydrogen and oxygen disappear when they become water.<sup>45</sup>

But "eternity," writes Blake among the 'Proverbs of Hell', "is in love with the productions of time",<sup>46</sup> recalling the Gnostic / Hermetic myth of the Anthropos (Blake's Albion) falling in love with his reflection in nature (the Vala), and having his love answered by created material.<sup>47</sup> In this sense the physical world is a lure and its comprehension by reason offering apparent possession of the body of the material and its subsequent manipulation are a seduction from the true home of the imagination outside the dimensions of time and space. As Ault puts it:

<sup>42</sup> There are interesting parallels between this point and the description of Milton and his shadow Self in *Milton* (K., p. 496).

<sup>43</sup> See p. 45

<sup>44</sup> Ault, *op. cit.*, p. 29

<sup>45</sup> Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 46

<sup>46</sup> K., p. 151

<sup>47</sup> Raine relates this to the "looking-glass of Enitharmon" or "vegetable glass of nature" (Raine, *From Blake to A Vision*, pp. 16f.). Frye, perversely, is somewhat dismissive of the "intolerably dull and puzzling"



Satan has the power to construct an exceedingly persuasive cosmos which bears a close enough resemblance to the true structure of the human imagination to lure fallen man into believing in such things as an external world which operates by external forces according to universal laws.<sup>48</sup>

This is an accurate representation of how we have observed Mephistopheles to have lured Faustus into manipulating time and space instead of freeing himself from them.

Blake's objections to Newton fall into three main categories. First, the perfection of Newtonian cosmology, its very rightness and explanatory power, has the effect of blinkering. Ault follows Thomas Kuhn<sup>49</sup> in echoing points made elsewhere<sup>50</sup> that a persuasive system alters the way in which reality is perceived and restricts the questions that are asked to phenomena which seem compatible with the system and its related solutions. The history of the origins of 'Chaos' science and the late appreciation of the problems of turbulence compared with the advances in the physics of linear forces and particles will bear this out. Secondly, Blake sees in the exaltation of the rational function of the conscious mind a proportional impoverishment of the human spirit crushed under its own iron necessity, so that the only redemptions available to it are on its own material and manipulative terms: the Mephistophelian toys of Faustus. Blake describes this at length in terms of the world of Urizen,<sup>51</sup> in whose name, it might be said, 'your reason' ironically metamorphoses into an aural impression of a 'drizzle of urine'.

Blake's third objection follows from this: the social and economic consequences, the 'Satanic mills' powered, as it were, by Newtonian science; their construction during the industrial revolution, while promising to relieve the burden of labour, in fact chained indigenous workforces more tightly to a polyp of finance and industrial process, which also fed on and encouraged colonial slavery. The images of bondage and torture proliferate in

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Gnostic Systems (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 111), but this reaction may be due to his distaste for any form of 'mysticism'.

<sup>48</sup> Ault, *Visionary Physics*, p. 164

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 46

<sup>50</sup> See the discussions on the relationships between science and culture in, e.g. Metzner, 'Die Bedeutung physikalischer Sätze für die Literatur', *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 53 (1979) 1-24, Irigaray, 'Is the Subject of Science Sexed?', *Cultural Critique*, 1 (1985), 73-88, Hayles, 'Turbulence in Literature and Science: Questions of Influence', *American Literature and Science*, ed. Scholnick, pp. 229-250.

<sup>51</sup> The builder of a "wide world of solid obstruction" to "repel the vast waves" in 'the First Book of Urizen', K., p. 224

Blake's work. Although the outrage that drove him to join the rioters in 1780 may have been converted to intellectual fervour, the 1792 engravings of the horrific tortures used against slaves in Guiana and the first-hand accounts they were based on by Captain Stedman, a mercenary who had returned a passionate abolitionist from his employment in quelling the revolt, obviously made a profound impression on Blake and confirmed him in his prophecy against empire, expressed in the conclusion of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* from the same period.

If succumbing to the lure of the material world described in Newtonian cosmology constitutes a Fall, it follows that this Fall happens, as a mythical event, in Eternity, which is to say at every timeless moment. The implication of this is that each moment when the potentialities inherent in each 'contrary' are forced into existence in order to actually happen and so exclude their other side in the form of a contradiction is a Fall.<sup>52</sup> Frye would agree: "The conclusion for Blake, and the key to much of his symbolism, is that the fall of man and the creation of the physical world were the same event."<sup>53</sup> In this sense the Gnostic Fall, or Agrippa's, is intimately related to the linguistic roots of verbs meaning 'to happen' (the Latin *cadere*, *Fall* in German, 'case' or 'befall' in English). Goethe's *Faust* programatically moves from *das Wort* to *die Tat*.

The corollary is that the possibility of redemption is also inherent in each moment and also, ironically, achievable through the intense erotic experience of the created world. Through poetry, which allows opposites to coexist by means of metonymy and ambiguity,<sup>54</sup> not as fudged vagueness but joined by a uniting symbol, it is possible to use an erotic relationship with the physical world to ironically expose its unreality and to reveal its true meaning. The apparently insignificant 'minute particulars', the "grain of sand in Lambeth", can become the Philosopher's Stone to effect an alchemical transformation of experience, inscribing it with a new meaning and numinous value in eternity beyond the distinction between existence and non-existence. At that moment the 'Mundane Shell' of Urizen's world

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<sup>52</sup> The striking analogy with quantum physics will be discussed in a later connection.

<sup>53</sup> Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 41

<sup>54</sup> For instance a unity of the prolific and the devouring discussed in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a central notion in the work of Wilson Harris



is dissipated in mere smoke and Prospero's visionary apocalypse becomes a moment of ecstatic transcendence.

However, as with Faustus, or as in the original Gnostic myth, the relationship with the Feminine is a core problem which Blake seems not to have solved. Redemption comes not outside but through the material world in which the creative imagination of Golgonooza opens into Beulah, an erotic and transcendent relationship with the material, opposed to the inspiration of the traditional Muses who are the daughters of memory, from which the erotic and fourfold characteristics of experience have been emptied by abstraction.<sup>55</sup> But the female figures who should make this possible, like Enitharmon or Oothoon, have a strange tendency to be either bound and helpless, or domineering, as though Blake was drawn himself into the disturbing fascination exerted by his illustrations of Stedman's accounts.<sup>56</sup> In 'The Mental Traveller' Blake pursues this theme of the alternating bondage and dominance of the sexes in the form of a vicious circle. Similarly, while revealing the power of Newton's system to enslave the imagination, his response is to create a system of his own. As Los says in *Jerusalem*:

I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's.<sup>57</sup>

But the result, for readers not familiar with the 'fourfold' reality behind it, can descend into empty allegory.

We now need to consider the *nature* of imagination as Blake sees it, and look further afield to how it appeared to others in the Romantic period. Frye writes:

But mountains in the world of experience are entirely motionless; what kind of faith can remove them? Well, a landscape painter can easily leave one out of his picture if it upsets his imaginative balance. And that kind of vision, which sees with perfect accuracy just what it wants to see, pierces the gates of heaven in the unfallen world.<sup>58</sup>

Here, it seems to me, is the central core of the Romantic crisis. If imagination is merely the artistic whim of the genius, divinity becomes an integral part of the ego, and the imagination the arbitrary vehicle of supreme solipsism. The individual makes her or his own universe.

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<sup>55</sup> Anyone who finds this difficult to follow might compare the living moment of a poem with a diary entry.

<sup>56</sup> See Klonsky, *William Blake: The Seer and his Visions*, pp. 46f., and also the frontispiece to the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>57</sup> K., p. 629

<sup>58</sup> Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 81

This, surely, is not what Blake means, or else why should he put such emphasis on the mystical, composite 'One Man' of Albion in whom the individual particles of light become holy?

Till the Jewels of Light,  
Heavenly Men beaming bright,  
Appear'd as One Man.<sup>59</sup>

A key figure in the discussion of imagination at this period is of course Kant. The first edition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), suggesting as it did that imagination was the common 'unknown root' of understanding and sensation, replaced being as the transcendent origin of truth, the supremacy of *on kai me on*, with the human imagination as the producer of truth. In Kearney's words: "Imagination thus ceases to be a copy, or a copy of a copy, and assumes the role of ultimate origin."<sup>60</sup> In Abrams' well-known formulation, the imagination is seen not as a mirror but as a lamp. Although Kant famously recoiled from the implications of what he had proposed — he later attempted to confine imaginative supremacy to aesthetics — philosophers such as Fichte and Schelling went further to make the imagination into the sun rather than a mere lamp, recognizing on their way their debt to Paracelsus and the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition. The assertion in transcendental idealism of such primacy of the imagination "would enable one to retrieve neglected and marginalized trends of Western thinking and rehabilitate them in the mainstream of a new 'scientific philosophy'."<sup>61</sup>

This rehabilitation was already taking place. Under the influence of Kant, Fichte and Schelling, Novalis was developing a philosophy he termed *magischer Idealismus*. In 'Blütenstaub' (Pollen Grains), a collection of 'Fragments' published in the Schlegels' new magazine the *Athenaeum* in 1798, Novalis was writing:

Wir *suchen* überall das Unbedingte, und *finden* immer nur Dinge.

(Everywhere we are *searching* for the unthinkable, but we only ever *find* things)<sup>62</sup>

or:

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<sup>59</sup> K., p. 805

<sup>60</sup> Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, p. 158

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 179

<sup>62</sup> in *Athenaeum I*, p. 51 (author's emphasis — my translation)



Wir träumen von Reisen durch das Weltall: ist denn das Weltall nicht in uns? Die Tiefen unseres Geistes kennen wir nicht. — Nach Innen geht der geheimnisvolle Weg. In uns oder nirgends ist die Ewigkeit mit ihren Welten, die Vergangenheit und die Zukunft.

(We dream of travel through the universe: but isn't the universe within us? We are unfamiliar with the depths of our minds. — Inward lead the paths of mystery. Within us or nowhere is Eternity with its worlds, the past and the future.)<sup>63</sup>

or:

Der Sitz der Seele ist da, wo sich Innenwelt und Außenwelt berühren.

(The seat of the soul is where the inner and outer worlds touch.)<sup>64</sup>

His concept of an apparently lifeless material world which could be awakened by artistic perception<sup>65</sup> was further developed in *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs*, set, significantly enough, in the Egyptian cradle of the Gnostic synthesis. His unfinished novel, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, begins with the well-known dream in which a blue flower appears to the protagonist, in which he sees the face of the girl he loves. This girl is an *anima* figure, an Ariel; who is made inaccessible like Dante's Beatrice or Novalis' Sophie von Kühn, and both flower and girl come to represent the power of poetical alchemy and symbolize the Romantic quest. Later in the novel, in the magician Klingsohr's fairytale, the story of the misdirection of Eros in the task of redemption, which delivers power instead to the rational 'scribe', can only end happily through the intervention of 'Fabel' (the child of 'Sinn' as consciousness with 'Phantasie', the imagination). Novalis saw magic (as in fairytale) at the heart of Romanticism.

The theme is taken up by E. T. A. Hoffmann in 'Der Goldene Topf', in which the student Anselmus is employed to transcribe old manuscripts for the archivist Lindhorst and discovers the alchemical secrets of the world of spirits, already familiar to him through the enchantments of the green snake Serpentina (again a Mercurius / anima figure) and her two sisters, but ridiculed by the bourgeois world around him. By mistaking the nature of the different worlds he precipitates a crisis which leaves him locked up in a glass bottle (like Mercurius in the Grimm fairytale). In a memorable image of double irony, the inability of

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 53

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 54

<sup>65</sup> Eichendorff was to pursue this idea of a magical *Ursprache*, which can be traced back through Böhme to Reuchlin and the Cabbala

'single vision' to comprehend what is meant by such processes is satirized during Anselmus' conversation with others shut up in glass bottles beside him:

>Aber meine besten, wertesten Herren!< sagte der Student Anselmus, >spüren Sie es denn nicht, daß Sie alle samt und sonders in gläsernen Flaschen sitzen und sich nicht regen und bewegen, viel weniger umherspazieren können?< — Da schlugen die Kreuzschüler und die Praktikanten eine helle Lache auf und schrieen: >Der Studiosus ist toll, er bildet sich ein, in einer gläsernen Flasche zu sitzen, und steht auf der Elbbrücke und sieht gerade hinein ins Wasser. Gehen wir nur weiter.<

("But my dear, esteemed sirs!" exclaimed the student Anselmus, "do you really not perceive that you are one and all shut up in glass bottles and cannot stir or move, let alone go strolling around the place?" — At that the college boys and trainees let out an enormous guffaw and screamed: "the scholar's off his rocker, he thinks he's inside a glass bottle, when all the time he's standing on the Elbe Bridge and looking straight down into the water. Let's be getting on.")<sup>66</sup>

Anselmus is freed when the Magus Lindhorst defeats his rival the witch, and lives happily ever after with Serpentina in Atlantis, which the writer can visit through creative imagination. Lindhorst, who is a salamander, alludes ironically to Gabalis and Swedenborg to stress the error of their reification of the ideas of spirit in a material world.<sup>67</sup>

Coleridge played an important role in making the themes of the German Romantic movement known in England, and it is probably to him rather than to Blake that English writers owe the context of their discussions on the primacy of the imagination. In Shelley, the myth of Prometheus takes on a particular significance as the figure who wrests creative power from God to give it to humans. Prometheus becomes the spokesman of imagination against a cruel and materialist Demiurge and thus the new Gnostic Faust, but the dark side of creativity projected into the material world also takes form from Mary Shelley as Frankenstein's monster.

As we might expect, this supreme flowering of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition also reactivated the Faust myth directly, in the form of Goethe's masterpiece. Discussion of Goethe's *Faust* lies outside the scope of this study, but it is certainly interesting to note Goethe's early acquaintance with the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition (as mentioned in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*) through his contacts with Katharina von Klettenberg in 1768, and the evidence of this is plain in such works as 'Die Geheimnisse' or in the alchemical basis of the second part of *Faust* with its apotheosis in the redeeming power of the fourfold Feminine

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<sup>66</sup> Hoffmann, *Werke I*, pp. 189f. (my translation)



("das Ewig Weibliche zieht uns hinan")<sup>68</sup> By then, however, the imagination was already disarmed and confined to a minor role in aesthetics, replaced by victorious mimetic realism.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 200

<sup>68</sup> More detail on this is given by Gilles Quispel, who also shows how Goethe learned about Gnosticism from Gottfried Arnold's *Impartial History of the Church and Heresy* (1700), a work which emphasised the positive aspects of Gnostic thought. (Quispel, 'Faust: Symbol of Western Man', *Eranos* 35, 1966, p. 260-65) It is a fascinating coincidence that Goethe, like Blake, became involved in controversy over Newtonian physics. It was only in the 20th century that Goethe's ideas on colour and optics, neglected outside anthroposophical circles, came to play a major role in the development of 'Chaos' science. (Gleick, *Chaos*, pp. 163ff.) For a basic study of Goethe and alchemy, see R. D. Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*.

## Chapter Six

### Rediscoveries: Kipling, Yeats, Crowley, Pauli and Jung

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For most of the 19th century, following the end of the Romantic resurgence, the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition seems to have disappeared, and following it underground goes beyond the scope of this survey. The tangible effects of the scientific materialism that Newtonian cosmology and 'single vision' implied were expressed in the technological achievements of societies organized as urban / industrial megamachines and went hand in hand with world domination by the European and North American powers, and latterly Japan, which dedicated themselves to those technologies.<sup>1</sup> Any niggling doubts<sup>2</sup> were largely sidelined as long as the metanarrative of progress could be maintained to deck out the imperial project. One of the channels through which Gnostic / Hermetic material was transmitted within the British Empire was Freemasonry, although to what extent it was recognized as such must remain doubtful. While Masonic Lodges were widespread throughout the British Empire, and though many still exist in postcolonial countries, they seem to have had a primarily philanthropic and social function, and their roots in the Rosicrucian furore seem to have calcinated into pure ritual.<sup>3</sup>

The end of the century saw an increase in interest in the hidden, occult traditions, however, coupled with a projection of their central mysteries into colonized or 'primitive' societies, expressed in fictions involving a journey beyond the lip of the known world. On the other side of this frontier, in an area where the powers of imperialist conquest falter, some mystery lies which, more often than not, is associated with the distant past or some hidden and unexpected resource. Examples of this type of literature include Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1886) and *She* (1887), Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899-1902),

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<sup>1</sup> Thus the great revolutions in thought arising in the 19th century associated with the ideas of Marx, Darwin and Freud remained firmly based within this materialist frame.

<sup>2</sup> Such as those implied in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

<sup>3</sup> Schuchard, in following the development of occult ideas as they can be observed in literature, argues for an even greater role for Freemasonry. See Note 35 below.



Hudson's *Green Mansions* (1904), Buchan's *Prester John* (1910), Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912), and one of Rudyard Kipling's earliest stories, 'The Man Who Would Be King' (1888), in which two men described as 'loafers', who lead a precarious existence on the margins of society in a series of odd jobs, scams and spells in jail ('seeing things from the underside') take off for the wilds of Afghanistan to make themselves kings. The story could, of course, simply be regarded as an effective ironic allegory of British imperialist adventurism in which a small number of determined men, with heavier firepower due to superior technology, exploit the divisions within a tribal society lacking centralized control; but there are additional factors in the story which suggest a more subtle interpretation.

The two men seeking a kingdom, Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan and Daniel Dravot, are introduced during the course of an elaborate frame story in which they enlist the help of the narrator, a journalist on a provincial paper. Carnehan first meets the narrator on a train on which both are travelling 'intermediate' through financial necessity, and persuades him by a coded appeal to a fellow Master Mason ("on the Square — for the sake of my Mother as well as your own"<sup>4</sup>) to deliver a message to his friend Dravot. Kipling, who had become a Mason on 5 April 1886 in the Lodge Hope and Perseverance No. 782 EC at Lahore, passing to the Second Degree on 3 May and being raised to Master Mason, Sublime Degree on 6 December of that year,<sup>5</sup> clearly found much in Masonic principles to interest him, and indeed the whole story is bound up with Masonic secrets. Though the narrator carries out Carnehan's request and contacts Dravot, he subsequently frustrates their plan to blackmail a native ruler, and so is somewhat surprised when they later turn up at his office with a 'Contract' they wish him to witness and a request to see books and maps about "the only place now in the world that two strong men can Sar-a-whack"<sup>6</sup> Their plan is to become kings in Kafiristan, and by the 'contract' to abstain from liquor and women, and conduct themselves 'with Dignity and Discretion', while doing so. The narrator makes much of the men's status as 'loafers' in

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<sup>4</sup> Kipling, 'The Man Who Would Be King', *Writings in Prose and Verse* 5, p. 44

<sup>5</sup> Orel, *A Kipling Chronology*, pp. 17f.

<sup>6</sup> Kipling, 'The Man Who Would Be King', p. 54. The allusion is to Sarawak, presented in 1842 to Sir James Brooke, of Bath, whose adventurous plans included the extermination of piracy in the East Indies. He founded a dynasty whose administration continued until the Japanese invasion in World War II.

comparison with his own dealings with kings, either those of native states, or those in Europe whose faraway lives fill the newspaper's columns.<sup>7</sup>

At their departure with a caravan of merchants bound for the Khyber Pass the narrator fails to recognize them at first. Dravot is disguised as a mad priest "attired in fragments of ribbons and rags", who is "gravely twisting a child's paper whirligig",<sup>8</sup> one of a consignment ostensibly for the Amir in Kabul, under which his rifles are hidden. This Mercurius / trickster figure with his flying whirligig (an image later used as an echo in his fatal fall from the bridge) is a kind of shaman, and the disguise will see him out of the known world into Kafiristan (the Land of the Unbelievers).<sup>9</sup> Considering that Kipling himself only spent a few days in March 1885 on the North-West Frontier,<sup>10</sup> and that the first extensive work on Kafiristan by George Robertson would not be published until a decade later,<sup>11</sup> Kipling's information is surprisingly accurate. The Kafiri culture he describes was soon to fall to imperialist conquest, but not by the British. Afghan forces would finally reduce the mountain peoples, who had held out the siege of 800-odd years, in 1898. Since then it has been known as Nuristan (Land of Light).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The epigraph to the story is the Masonic motto 'Brother to a Prince and fellow to a beggar if he be found worthy'. However, the higher grades of Freemasonry make extensive use of royal-sounding titles. A certificate of admission to the Ancient and Accepted Rite (Rose Croix) 18th degree granted at Allahabad in 1916 gives the Mason, in addition to his previous titles Expert Master of the Symbolic Lodges, Secret Master, Perfect Master, Intimate Secretary, Provost and Judge, Intendant of Buildings, Elect of Nine, Elect of Fifteen, Sublime Elect, Grand Master Architect, Ancient Master of the Royal Arch, Grand Elect Perfect and Sublime Mason, the new titles Knight of the Sword of the East, Prince of Jerusalem, Knight of the East and West and Excellent and Perfect Prince Rose-Croix of H.R.D.M.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 58

<sup>9</sup> From Kipling's description we can infer that the two men pass beyond Jelalabad before striking north up the Laghman and Alingar valleys, abandoning their camels and obtaining donkeys to arrive in the territory of the Ashku people. From then on the mountainous and wooded country would permit only travel on foot.

<sup>10</sup> Orel, *A Kipling Chronology*, p. 15

<sup>11</sup> Robertson, *The Káfirs of the Hindu Kush*, London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1896

<sup>12</sup> Nuristan, which I visited in 1969, has remained in many ways as Kipling describes it. The scattered communities of its peoples, who speak separate dialects of an Indo-European language, are cut off by steep mountainsides in the southern valleys of the Hindu Kush, and have frequently fought each other as much as previously their common enemies the Muslims. The last such internecine conflict had been in 1945. I visited the Ashku, and the Kalasha of the Vaigal valley. The Kalasha live in villages consisting of up to 600 wood and mud houses with cantilevered roofs stepped on the hillsides so that the roof in front acts as a terrace and the village thoroughfares are ladders hollowed out of larger trunks or cut into thinner ones. This allows all available flat space to be cultivated in subsistence agriculture in fields irrigated from above by a giddying system of aqueducts formed of hollow trunks cantilevered over precipices. The houses traditionally contained beds, tables and chairs (found in no neighbouring country), and have wooden doors and pillars decorated with emblems representing social status gained by families. Though few traces of the old religion remained after Islamic domination, and the old equestrian statues of Imra and the rest of the pantheon, even those hidden during the conquest, were all taken to Kabul, enough of the old culture remained when I was there to provide some fascinating insights. The temples, like large wooden houses positioned between the communities of herder-warriors and lower-caste artisans, now function as mosques, but the carved wooden headstones in the



In 'The Man Who Would Be King' Carnehan and Dravot are able to establish power through a series of coincidences as gods rather than kings, because they discover that the inhabitants, who are described as fair-skinned and as using chairs and tables, are second-degree Masons. The two men, as Master-Masons, take charge of Lodge meetings, establishing the Lodge in the temple of the chief god Imbra. To their amazement, the priests recognize the Masters' insignia on their aprons, which are revealed as the same as a mark on the stone in the temple which had puzzled even the priests, so Dravot and Carnehan are taken to be gods. They unite the warring clans under their rule, only to fall by being proved mortal when Daniel breaks the 'contract' in order to take a wife and 'overreach himself' by confusing his spiritually inspired status with plans to make himself Emperor and to hand over the new realm to Queen Victoria in exchange for a political knighthood.<sup>13</sup> The Faustian implications are clear.



11. Graveyard in Nuristan showing carvings

Dravot goes bravely to his death while Carnehan, crucified between pine trees, survives and is allowed to leave after being fed in the temple "because they said he was more of a God than old Daniel that was a man".<sup>14</sup> Emphasis is laid on his ambivalent status as God / man, in a temple which is a Masonic

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graveyards remain, and the dancing and music of the pipes, drums and four-stringed horizontal harp (the 'waj') tell stories of the deeds of ancestors. Status can no longer be gained by killing Muslims (whose heads, according to legend, were sometimes spiked outside houses), but the alternative method, through generosity towards the village, is still practised. All the work of the community is shared, but there is private property. Dowries are paid to the bride's family by the bridegroom. The youngest son inherits all the property. Women are unveiled, and men less influenced by Islam wear felt jackets, knee breeches with leggings, and the Chitral caps which became emblems of resistance to Russian communism. The people themselves are of mixed appearance including some with light skin and fair or even red hair, and the striking beauty of many women and men once made them sought-after as slaves in Kabul. Scholarly opinion suggests that they are Indo-European remnants left on the periphery of general migration westwards, rather than, as was once believed, the descendants of Greeks captured by the Persian Empire, but their customs, music and appearance suggest they might be related to the Near-Eastern people among whom the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition originated. Whether Kipling was aware of this must remain speculation. Useful information on the peoples of Nuristan, including a bibliography, can be found at Richard Strand's website:

<http://users.sedona.net/~strand/index.html#TOP>.

<sup>13</sup> Though Paul Fussell lacks important information about Kafiristan, his revealing analysis of the story makes this point well: Fussell, 'Irony, Freemasonry, and Humane Ethics in Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King"', *English Literary History* 25 (1958), pp. 216-33.

<sup>14</sup> Kipling, 'The Man Who Would Be King', p. 95



Lodge (doubling in ritual as the Templum Hierosolyma, the Temple of Solomon<sup>15</sup>); his journey back to India clutching Dravot's red-bearded head still wearing its crown on "battered temples"<sup>16</sup> recalls not only the Masonic rituals surrounding the murder of Hiram Abiff,<sup>17</sup> the architect (with the two kings Solomon of Israel and Hiram of Tyre) of the temple in Jerusalem and thus one of the 'three sojourners' who in spirit are the founders of the Masonic Kingdom, but also the accusations levelled against the Knights Templar, who also seem to have had knowledge of the Gnostic / Hermetic tenets, namely that they worshipped a mysterious red-bearded head known as Baphomet. Dravot is the 'Son of God' whom Carnehan follows in the hymn verse that he sings as he walks up the midday street (and one of the Masonic rituals involves knowledge that the sun is always at the zenith over the Mason), but when Carnehan dies in the asylum no trace of the head can be found. These multiple allusions and ironies suggest strong currents of hidden myths and images waiting to emerge, albeit treated with ironic distance by Kipling.

Though Kipling continued his association with freemasonry,<sup>18</sup> and though his family, notably his mother and sister, had psychic experiences, he was worried about the consequences of involvement with the supernatural, increasingly so as a result of his sister's mental illness. Angus Wilson quotes his poem 'En-Dor':

And nothing has changed of the sorrow in store  
For such as go down on the road to En-Dor

with its condemnation of spiritualist exploitation of grief to show "why he did not believe in organized attempts to make contact with psychic powers":<sup>19</sup> Even though, as Wilson points out, he corresponded with Rider Haggard about 'transcendental experiences', it seems Kipling was unwilling to take the intimations in 'The Man Who Would Be King' any further, or had no way apart from the rituals of Freemasonry of associating them with a

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<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that this temple in Masonic lore has an allegorical meaning. Mme Blavatsky writes: "The building of the Temple of Solomon is the symbolical representation of the gradual acquirement of the *secret* wisdom, or magic; the creation and development of the spiritual from the earthly; the manifestation of the power and splendor of the spirit in the physical world, through the wisdom and genius of the builder. The latter, when he has become an adept, is a mightier king than Solomon himself, the emblem of the sun or *Light* himself — the light of the real subjective world, shining in the darkness of the objective universe." (Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* II, p. 391 — author's emphases)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 95

<sup>17</sup> The legend of Hiram has been equated with that of Osiris.

<sup>18</sup> Orel notes that he attended the consecration of the Masonic 'Authors' Lodge' in London in 1910. and was also a Rosicrucian: Orel, *A Kipling Chronology*, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, p. 267



central tradition involving magic. Studies into magic at this time were closely identified with the larger-than-life personality of Madame Blavatsky, and her reputation in India had suffered from the allegations of fraud made about her centre for the 'Mahatmas' or guiding spirits at Adyar, near Madras, in the mid-1880s.<sup>20</sup> Around Madame Blavatsky congregated all those who, with greater or lesser degrees of scepticism about her actual practices, shared an interest in her undoubted knowledge of the occult, announced in *Isis Unveiled* (1880)<sup>21</sup> and manifested in the Theosophical Society.<sup>22</sup> They dedicated themselves to the study of all the texts they could find belonging to the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition, while Masonic and Rosicrucian ritual gave the outward form to various groups aspiring, usually by degrees of initiation progressing towards inner arcana, to knowledge hidden through centuries of persecution and disapproval, but always with the old implicit goal: the magical manipulation of apparent reality open to the true adept.<sup>23</sup> Madame Blavatsky's Theosophists, including G.R.S. Meade, whose interests included Simon Magus and Simonian Gnosticism, shared this goal with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, among whose members were S.L. MacGregor Mathers, who published work on the Cabala and editions of the grimoires *The Key of Solomon* and *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, A.E. Waite, whose name is associated with the Tarot, Aleister Crowley, who later styled himself the 'Great Beast', and W.B. Yeats.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kipling is sharply satirical about bogus magical claims in 'The Sending of Dana Da'.

<sup>21</sup> *Isis Unveiled* particularly stresses the importance of the Gnostics and of a tradition stemming from them: "But if the Gnostics were destroyed, the *Gnosis*, based on the secret science of sciences, still lives. It is the earth which helps the woman, and which is destined to open her mouth to swallow up mediæval Christianity, the usurper and assassin of the great master's doctrine. The ancient *Kabala*, the *Gnosis*, or traditional *secret* knowledge, was never without its representatives in any age or country." (Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* II, p. 38 — author's emphases)

<sup>22</sup> A co-founder of the Society and the author of its name, Charles Sotheran, was like Kipling a Mason and a Rosicrucian, but Kipling did not involve himself with her circle in London when he was there in the late 1880s.

<sup>23</sup> "One common vital principle pervades all things, and this is controllable by the perfected human will." (Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* II, p. 590)

<sup>24</sup> For a description of the founding of the Order as well as bibliographical references to the available source materials, see Fennelly, 'W.B. Yeats and MacGregor Mathers' in Harper (Ed.), *Yeats and the Occult*, pp. 285-306. The Order claimed its legitimacy from a German occult group calling itself 'Die Goldene Dämmerung'. It differed from Freemasonry in accepting women as members. Detailed information on the order and its members can be found in balanced and scholarly form in Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians*, and Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Companion*.



Yeats acknowledged his life-long debt to Mathers, both explicitly in describing the use of symbols as a visionary technique<sup>25</sup> and in the use of the character Michael Robartes as one aspect of his thought. However, by 1900, a split had developed between the two men. Yeats, who had previously half-consciously amended or excused Mathers' extravagant statements as part of a Romantic image inherited from Shelley or Goethe: "so might Faust have looked in his changeless aged youth",<sup>26</sup> came to believe that Mathers had wandered on to what he called the Path of the Chameleon ('Hodos Chameliontos'), in which the subject can become lost in a series of projected images, and reckoned that his mind was unhinged. Eventually Mathers was expelled from the Order, but he resisted his expulsion and sent Aleister Crowley to London to seize the Order's rooms. The bizarre meeting at which this 'mad person' (Yeats's term) "attempted to retake possession wearing a black mask and in full Highland costume and with a gilt dagger by his side" but was thwarted by Yeats is emblematic of the difference between the two men, and the different approaches to the occult revival and to magic.<sup>27</sup>

Crowley, having been refused initiation into the inner circle of the Golden Dawn Order, abandoned it in 1900 after his abortive duel with Yeats. He studied under other teachers and finally established his own Order of the Silver Star. In 1909, as a 'Master' magician with the name 'Perturabo', he recruited Victor Neuburg, a younger man recently graduated from Cambridge, as his 'chela' or novice initiate.<sup>28</sup> The two men travelled to Algiers, where Crowley had Neuburg's head shaved so that only two tufts stuck up at the temples like the horns Faustus planted on the Knight's head at the Emperor's court. In the desert Crowley was anxious to try a Faustian magic, using John Dee's 'Enochian' system to call angels or spirits, as Dee had with Kelley at Třeboň,<sup>29</sup> revealing an entire cosmology of thirty Aethyrs

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<sup>25</sup> "Now too I learned a practice, a form of meditation that has perhaps been the intellectual chief influence on my life up to perhaps my fortieth year." Yeats, *Memoirs*, p. 27

<sup>26</sup> Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 187

<sup>27</sup> This account is taken from Fennelly, , 'W.B. Yeats and MacGregor Mathers' in Harper (Ed.), *Yeats and the Occult*, p. 303. Yeats's words are quoted from a letter to Lady Gregory. The full story is told in Harper, "Meditations upon Unknown Thought": Yeats's Break with MacGregor Mathers', *Yeats Studies* 1 (1971), pp. 175-202.

<sup>28</sup> For the story of Crowley and Neuburg, and the consequences of their North African experiences, I am indebted to Alex Owen's fascinating essay 'The Sorcerer and his Apprentice: Aleister Crowley and the Magical Exploration of Edwardian Subjectivity', *Journal of British Studies* 36 (1997), pp. 99-133.

<sup>29</sup> The system involves 'astral travel', a journey through the macrocosm within one's own mind, which was also used by the Golden Dawn, and is described in detail by Steiner. As practised by Dee, the magic involved



or realms of supernatural existence. In a lonely place Crowley would recite a ritual incantation allowing him access to each Aethyr in turn by concentrating on a stone, like the stone Dee and Kelley used.<sup>30</sup>

Dee's work with Kelley had reached a crisis, it will be recalled, when the spirits apparently instructed him to carry out sexual magic involving both their wives. Crowley, denied access to the fourteenth Aethyr by an "all-glorious angel", conducted a ceremony within a stone circle on a mountain-top, where he 'sacrificed himself' by having himself sodomized by Neuburg. Owen assumes that this homosexual magic involved Neuburg's possession by the god Pan. Crowley wrote later: "There was an animal in the wilderness, but it was not I."<sup>31</sup> He felt on the edge of an Abyss, a term familiar to magicians as the renunciation of the individual personality. A few days later Crowley attempted to use ritual magic to challenge the demon Choronzon, of the tenth Aethyr, and subject him to his magical will. Owen describes the Abyss and the demon that arose from it as follows:

It represented Dispersion: a terrifying chaos in which there was no center and no controlling consciousness. Its fearsome Dweller was not an individual but the personification of a magnitude of malignant forces made manifest through the massed energy of the evoking magician. But to experience these forces at the most immediate and profoundly personal level, and to believe, as Neuburg did, that he had been involved in a fight to the death with them, was shattering.<sup>32</sup>

It was an experience that neither man recovered from. The reification of the projected unconscious forces was to turn Crowley from a role-player who assumed exotic masks into the buffoon 'Beast 666', whose ruthless demonism was summed up in his motto "Do What Thou Wilt". Because he accepted the absolute reality of what he had experienced on its own terms he fell under its spell. What he conjured up also conjured him. Turning to the irrational, though it is 'real', is no alternative to rational single vision because it is in fact the obverse of the same mistaken premise. As Owen says, "Far from establishing an all-seeing, harmonious relationship with the unconscious, working with it to achieve magical ends, the unconscious now controlled and dominated him."<sup>33</sup>

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contacts made by Kelley as the 'skryer', conveying messages from the 'angels' in reply to Dee's questions. Dee himself did not fall into a trance-like state or see or hear angels. See also p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> Here, however, Crowley was both medium and interlocutor.

<sup>31</sup> Owen, *The Sorcerer and his Apprentice: Aleister Crowley and the Magical Exploration of Edwardian Subjectivity*, p. 108.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125



Crowley at this time was unfamiliar with the theories of depth psychology, so did not see his experience in these terms, whereas Yeats intuitively recognized that magical and artistic images are related, and that both seem to originate both within and beyond the individual mind: "...I began certain studies and experiences, that were to convince me that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or subconscious memory."<sup>34</sup> Yeats was first drawn to Mathers and Blavatsky by the dream that some unknown Master might be persuaded to reveal the secret knowledge of the world.<sup>35</sup> Yeats quotes Shelley's lines on how the seeker for wisdom must sail alone at sunset and call 'Ahasuerus', and, if he is lucky, be guided to the sea-cavern where he lies.<sup>36</sup> The approach to such a Magus is, characteristically, by sea, via the unconscious, to the boundary between the conscious and unconscious that is represented by the cave.<sup>37</sup>

In 1892 Yeats published a short prose piece entitled 'Rosa Alchemica', which describes how the narrator is visited by Michael Robartes, a man whose "wild red hair, fierce eyes, sensitive, tremulous lips and rough clothes"<sup>38</sup> recall Daniel Dravot. He intrudes on the narrator's reverie about the spiritual nature of alchemy. The latter sees the stars as so many "divine alchemists" labouring to turn "lead into gold, weariness into ecstasy, bodies into souls, the darkness into God" and longs for the birth of an "elaborate spiritual beauty" to inspire him. Robartes enters through the peacock curtains (the *cauda pavonis* is the alchemical signal that the completion of the *opus* is approaching) to try to persuade him to join his 'Order of the Alchemical Rose'. Mesmerized by the visions Robartes conjures

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<sup>34</sup> Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 183

<sup>35</sup> H. R. Bachchan, surveying the various influences on Yeats, which included the *Upanishads*, concludes that "the effect of Madame Blavatsky's writings on Yeats was deeper and more permanent than has hitherto been estimated." (Bachchan, *W. B. Yeats and Occultism*, p. 226). Bachchan also maintains that Blavatsky, while attempting to synthesize her ideas with elements of Hindu philosophy picked up in India, was primarily providing a compendium of "the Western Occultists, the Cabbalists, Rosicrucians, Alchemists and Hermetists" (Ibid., p. 220), and it was this material that first came to Yeats's attention through A. P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*. Schuchard emphasizes the importance of Freemasonry: "Yeats revitalized the artistic significance of this neo-Masonic occult tradition. He drew upon Masonic archives and oral materials in order to accurately place Blake in an occultist, millennial tradition, rooted in seventeenth century Rosicrucianism and carried on in Blake's day by fellow Masonic Illuminés in Europe... Thus for nearly three centuries, Freemasonry provided a continuous reservoir of occultist philosophy, visionary training, and political radicalism, which linked many English writers with an international world of ideas." (Schuchard, *Freemasonry, Secret Societies, and the Continuity of the Occult Traditions in English Literature*, p. vi)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 172f.

<sup>37</sup> Yeats's discussion of Shelley and his 'ruling symbols', including those of the cave and water, as well as the moon and the tower, can be found in 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', *Collected Works* VI, pp. 71-110.

<sup>38</sup> Yeats, 'Rosa Alchemica', *Collected Works* VII, p. 110



through secret gestures accompanied by illusions of sight and scent, the narrator is told of the spiritual alternatives to Christianity (and to the polarity of *on kai me on*) represented by Roland, Hamlet and Faust. Robartes stresses that though the divinities seem to have been abolished, they return to "make and unmake humanity". He becomes the weaver of a web in which the narrator sees resonant figures like Lear (who created external thunder from the storm in his mind), Beatrice (the immortal muse), Mary (the spirit of virgin motherhood), and Aphrodite (perfect erotic beauty). Resisting the images in an attempt to assert the principles of mimesis, that the great man's mind should "reflect everything with indifferent precision like a mirror",<sup>39</sup> he finds, as the peacocks grow and cover him, that the mirror breaks into countless fragments to allow him paradoxically to merge in the 'unity of being' of the Anima Mundi, before falling, as a "drop of molten gold" back into the real world.<sup>40</sup>

As a consequence of the visions induced by Robartes the narrator agrees to be initiated at the Order's temple by the sea ('between the salt water and the sea strand') on the west coast of Ireland. The location is reminiscent of Rosses Point, where Yeats carried out psychic experiments with his uncle George Pollexfen,<sup>41</sup> and which Yeats himself compares with Newton's shore:

Often at evening when a boy  
Would I carry to a friend —  
Hoping more substantial joy  
Did an older mind commend —  
Not such as are in Newton's metaphor,  
But actual shells of Rosses' level shore.<sup>42</sup>

The description of the building emphasizes the relationship between the older Gnostic / Hermetic basis and its revival, in the debatable and paradoxical suspension between conscious and unconscious:

... and when Michael Robartes pointed to a square ancient-looking house, with a much smaller and newer building under its lee, set on the very end of a delapidated and almost deserted pier, and said it was the Temple of the Alchemical Rose, I was possessed with the phantasy that the sea, which kept covering it with showers of white foam, was claiming it as part of some indefinite and passionate life, which had begun to war on our orderly

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 117

<sup>40</sup> On the paradox of the shattered mirror compare the same image used by Yeats in describing the conscious world, where sympathy between diverse people seems to be vanishing: "Doubtless because fragments broke into ever smaller fragments we saw one another in a light of bitter comedy..." (Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 192), a world where "things fall apart, the centre cannot hold". Compare also Pound's treatment of the same paradox in 'Near Perigord': "And all the rest of her a shifting change, / A broken bundle of mirrors...!"

<sup>41</sup> Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 258

<sup>42</sup> Yeats, 'At Algeciras — A Meditation upon Death', *The Poems* (Ed. Finneran), p. 246



and careful days, and was about to plunge the world into a night as obscure as that which followed the downfall of the classical world.<sup>43</sup>

Before they enter they are cursed by a pious fisherman, but continue.<sup>44</sup> First the narrator is left in a library where he finds works by Morienus<sup>45</sup> and Flavel, among others. The prophetic writings of William Blake are there,<sup>46</sup> and also a peacock box containing a book which describes the foundation of the Order through the agency of the gods of the imagination and stresses that the power of their magic is dependent on the imagination's power.<sup>47</sup> Finally the initiation itself takes place, in which amid Rosicrucian symbols the members of the Order, in red robes, join in a mystical dance merging with the bodies of the gods through the agency of Eros, until the narrator finds himself dancing with an "immortal, august woman", who is "drinking up my soul".<sup>48</sup> He loses consciousness, and wakes in the chill dawn to an assault by the folk from the land, the representatives of the 'real world', but manages to escape, significantly in a boat on the seaward side, and rows to safety, leaving his fellow initiates to their fate.

This story, and the two accompanying it, 'The Tables of the Law'<sup>49</sup> and 'The Adoration of the Magi',<sup>50</sup> deal with the tension Yeats felt between his spiritual intuitions that the world

<sup>43</sup> Yeats, 'Rosa Alchemica', *Collected Works* VII, p. 122

<sup>44</sup> This appears to be an allusion to the opposition Yeats felt subjected to from those who doubted his religious or political orthodoxy, which always made his relations with Nationalists and Republicans uneasy, though he shared their aim of Irish independence. During the Civil War Yeats had an armed guard as an Anti-Treatyite target.

<sup>45</sup> See pp. 38f.

<sup>46</sup> Yeats collaborated with the painter Edwin Ellis on an edition of Blake's prophetic and mystical writings between 1889 and 1896. He stresses Blake's understanding of the 'symbolic imagination' as "a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame" ('William Blake and his Illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*', *Collected Works* VI, p. 138) and that he took his conception of the imagination as "the first emanation of divinity" from "the old alchemist writers" ('William Blake and the Imagination', *Collected Works* VI, p. 133). With reference to Blake Yeats states programmatically: "False art is not expressive, but mimetic, not from experience but from observation, and is the mother of all evil, persuading us to save our bodies alive at no matter what cost of rapine and fraud. True art is the flame of the last day, which begins for every man, when he is first moved by beauty, and which seeks to burn all things until they become 'infinite and holy'." ('William Blake and his Illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*', *Collected Works* VI, p. 169) Kathleen Raine has thoroughly elucidated the connections between Blake's thinking and Yeats's in her study *From Blake to A Vision*.

<sup>47</sup> Note Yeats's revealing comparison of the imagination with the body of "Father Christian Rosencrux", preserved through generations in a secret tomb, which is rediscovered at various times when "other students of the order came upon the tomb by chance" ('The Body of the Father Christian Rosencrux' in *Collected Works* VI, p. 240).

<sup>48</sup> Yeats, 'Rosa Alchemica', *Collected Works* VII, p. 136

<sup>49</sup> 'The Tables of the Law' describes the effects on Owen Aherne of the message of a priceless book announcing the successive ages of obedience (the Father), of devotion (the Son), and of responsibility (the Holy Spirit). These ideas can also be found in Jung.

<sup>50</sup> In 'The Adoration of the Magi' three old men witness Hermes' restoration of the "things that were yesterday" so that "another Achilles [shall] beleaguer another Troy" (*Collected Works* VII, p. 173) before they learn from a dying whore the names of the divinities of the imagination. Whitaker draws attention to the



of 'single vision' was fractured — he referred to Mallarmé writing that "his epoch was troubled by the trembling of the veil of the Temple"<sup>51</sup> — and his anxiety that the revival of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition would simply lead via the 'Hodos Chameliontos' to the unleashing of uncontrollable and dark forces of the type Crowley experienced; Mathers was convinced of a coming cataclysm, and Yeats wondered "what rough beast, its hour come round at last / slouches towards Bethlehem to be born".<sup>52</sup>

Yeats's studies in Celtic mythology led him to associate the visionary world with the faery world, the Sidhe, as both ecstasy and peril. He also prefigured Jung in his recognition that the images welled up from some other source than individual memory, conscious or subconscious, from an "age-long memorial self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb",<sup>53</sup> that there was a common matrix of archetypal patterning which could also be expressed in Irish mythology. His figures from Irish legend are used, like Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne, as fictional correlatives to the inner world of the author as he experienced these archetypes, and to the people in Yeats's life with whom the archetypes were associated. In this sense Yeats is refiguring Blake's 'Fourfold Vision'. On the first level there are the relationships and circumstances in 'reality'. On this level Robartes can be associated with Mathers, Aherne with Lionel Johnson, Queen Maeve with Maud Gonne. On the second level these become metonymic correlatives, to be associated with aspects or projections of the imagination. Yeats terms these 'Masks'. On the third level they become part of a greater dance within the psyche, taking on a numinous charge (Yeats's 'Image' and Blake's 'Beulah'), while on the final level they merge within the unity of the World Spirit.

One of Yeats's chief concerns was establishing the relationships between these levels. He had discovered that the imagination, in certain circumstances, can 'create' realities,<sup>54</sup> becoming, more than either mirror or lamp, the 'proejector' of a world that takes on physical reality to the perception; the process was not, however, dependent on the will — "our

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parallels between this prostitute girl and the Helen of Simon Magus, the embodiment of Sophia, and makes it clear Yeats was aware of this Gnostic myth (Whitaker, *Swan and Shadow*, pp. 47f.).

<sup>51</sup> Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 109, and 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae', *Mythologies*, p. 367. Interesting congruencies emerge between Yeats and the poets reviving the Romantic ethos, notably Hofmannsthal, Rilke and Valéry.

<sup>52</sup> Yeats, 'The Second Coming', *Poems*, p. 187

<sup>53</sup> Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 272



images must be given to us, we cannot choose them deliberately"<sup>55</sup> — but they also depend on artistic skill, like that of the Japanese painter Yeats had read about "so remarkable that horses he had painted upon a temple wall had slipped down after dark and trampled the neighbours' fields of rice. Somebody had come into the temple in the early morning, had been startled by a shower of water-drops, had looked up and seen painted horses still wet from the dew-covered fields but now 'trembling into stillness'".<sup>56</sup>

In his plays influenced by Noh drama Yeats pursues these themes. In 'At the Hawk's Well' (1917) two aspects of the Gnostic seeker approach the source of the inspired imagination. Both have been brought by what seem lucky coincidences to wait for the apparently dry and choked spring to be filled with water.<sup>57</sup> One of them has grown old waiting for the miraculous water, which has only appeared while he has been asleep and unconscious. He has been tricked by the dancers, the elusive, mercurial seduction of the Anima, and now the Guardian of the Well gives him no response. The younger man, the active hero Cuchulain, also misses the water when he is led away in pursuit of a girl in the shape of a hawk, a shadow or dark Anima figure, whose lidless, 'hateful' eyes lead him to battle against shadows. Neither can integrate the imagination with conscious life, and the final chorus commends those who are content with superficiality and do not praise "dry stones in a well".<sup>58</sup> Yeats, though, was never prepared to succumb to the authority of religion or nationalism or realism, but held to the path of the 'self-moving and self-teaching' magical soul, in a tradition that he believed "more universal and more ancient".<sup>59</sup>

Cuchulain enters a similar constellation of characters even more clearly corresponding to the women in Yeats's life in 'The Only Jealousy of Emer' (1919). Set once again by the sea from which female beauty has emerged like a 'frail bird' or a 'fragile, exquisite, pale shell', the play shows how the wife, Emer, is persuaded by Cuchulain's double, the deformed Bricriu, that to save the seemingly dead hero from being carried off by the faery woman

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 262-74

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 272

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 186. Variants of this story exist about a number of great artists.

<sup>57</sup> This prefiguring of the pool in Eliot's rose-garden is of course another image of the Grail or magic cauldron of Celtic mythology. A more recent and poignant version of it can be found in Martinu's cantata *The Opening of the Wells*.

<sup>58</sup> Yeats, 'At The Hawk's Well', *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats*, p. 413. I am indebted to the discussions of this play in Wilson, *Yeats's Iconography*, pp. 27-72, and Taylor, *A Reader's Guide to the Plays of W. B. Yeats*, pp. 58-64.



Fand she will need to renounce his love in favour of his young mistress, Eithne Inguba. The play can be read as a plea that the Ego (Yeats), enchanted by the battle against the sea of the unconscious, requires the self-sacrifice of his wife (George) to aid one Anima figure (Iseult Gonne) against the other (Maud Gonne), who has caused his fall.

This play was written at the start of the extraordinary series of 'automatic writings' on which Yeats based the 'system' of *A Vision*, which, with its interpenetrating cones and tensions of complementary opposites arranged according to the phases of a lunar cycle, is a direct inheritance of Blake and Fludd. As the full story behind its genesis has emerged, it has become clear that George Yeats was not a naïve medium, but, as her husband's equal in the ranks of the Golden Dawn, fully aware of the major occult texts of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.<sup>60</sup> Yeats had also had considerable experience with automatic script.<sup>61</sup> Brenda Maddox, noting how selfless George Yeats's devotion must have been faced with so many questions concerning Maud and Iseult Gonne and references to their perfection of beauty,<sup>62</sup> concludes that the writings may have been a kind of ploy to harness Yeats's desire for them to direct attention to her own needs, and as a kind of menstrual family planning almanac. The question of the status of *A Vision* is not easy. For conventional realists and rationalists, both it and the story of its creation will be a puzzle and an embarrassment. At worst it must be a complicated hoax, at best the sadly wasted effort of deluded minds. Seen reductively, it is nothing more than the repressed reflection of Yeats's obsessions and inadequacies, or alternatively it is the necessary but bizarre price of the aesthetic glories of the poetry. If, on the other hand, it is to be taken at face value, the door is open to absolute irrationality and the barmier reaches of occult fantasy.<sup>63</sup>

Yeats himself, unlike Mathers or Crowley, does not succumb to a reification of the unconscious or its pretensions, because he turns them into a fiction in which the laws of *on*

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<sup>59</sup> Yeats, *Mythologies*, pp. 368f.

<sup>60</sup> Maddox, *George's Ghosts*, pp. 58f.

<sup>61</sup> Harper, *Yeats's Vision Papers* Vol. 1, pp. 1-9

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218f., & Vol 2, pp. 390-405. One should note Yeats's association of ideal beauty with the full phase of the moon. The moon goddess Selene is associated with the Helen of Simon Magus.

<sup>63</sup> Recent commentators (e.g. Harper, Foster)<sup>63</sup> have followed Raine and Wilson in being less dismissive, noting how closely this area of Yeats's life is interwoven with his art and with a wider tradition; Maddox, though first suggesting a conscious element in George Yeats's contribution, points out how apparent coincidences crystallize in apposition to the inner visions, so that at Yeats's death, ironically, the wife and



*kai me on* and of time (though not of history)<sup>64</sup> are suspended. The projections of the unconscious are allowed reality, but are subjected to the discipline and systematization of a clearly conscious mind.<sup>65</sup> Through a multiple series of fictional 'frames', personae and narrating voices the origin and message of *A Vision* is kept ambiguous; in 'The Phases of the Moon', the poet, Robartes and Aherne occupy a series of Chinese boxes by which Yeats is held "full of uncertainty, not knowing when I am the finger, when the clay".<sup>66</sup> When Sean O'Faolain expostulated: "There *was* no Yeats! I watched him invent himself,"<sup>67</sup> he unwittingly characterized the alchemy of the contraries endured and finally suspended in a double vision, a final ambivalence between the 'foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart', where the *lapis* can be found, and the alchemical *opus* that can be made of it.<sup>68</sup>

The parallels between Yeats's thought and that of C.G. Jung are particularly striking. In 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae' (1917), a summary of Yeats's ideas on the psyche up to that time, he repeats the image of consciousness as the edge of the sea that forms the unconscious matrix: "Our daily thought was certainly but the line of foam at the shallow edge of a vast luminous sea."<sup>69</sup> He agrees with both Jung and Freud in distinguishing between the conscious and the unconscious mind, but whereas for Freud the unconscious is the seat of repressed memories stemming from drives generically attributable to Eros and Thanatos, whose psychopathology is reducible to material and biological facts, a scheme which privileges a Newtonian, if not mechanistic 'reality', Yeats veers towards Jung in

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latest mistress take the places at the bedside they had been assigned in 'The Only Jealousy of Emer' (c.f. Maddox, *George's Ghosts*, pp. 362f.).

<sup>64</sup> See Whitaker, *Swan and Shadow*, pp. 15-33.

<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, *A Vision* could be seen as a metonymic reality, a complex typology in an age that demanded the separation and categorization of consciousness, as a Blakean alternative to other men's systems, but dangerously near the petrified objectivity of reified projections.

<sup>66</sup> Yeats, 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae', *Mythologies*, p. 366. Sidnell (Mr Yeats, Michael Robartes and Their Circle' in Harper (Ed.), *Yeats and the Occult*, pp. 225-54) discusses the development of the 'double vision' of Michael Robartes through Yeats's career, showing the synthesis of his origins in inspiration, character, fictional reality and real fiction. It is of interest to consider the relative symbolic importance of the sea and the tower in the fiction and poetry concerning Robartes and Aherne during this time, images Yeats discusses in 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', *Collected Works VI*, pp. 71-110.

<sup>67</sup> Maddox, *George's Ghosts*, p. xv

<sup>68</sup> Maddox sums this up somewhat more prosaically and patronizingly: "All his life Yeats retained what some might consider a very Irish facility for sustaining belief and disbelief at the same time." (*George's Ghosts*, p. 79) The final irony that the right body might not be in Yeats's grave at Drumcliff but may have remained at Roquebrun is singularly appropriate.

<sup>69</sup> Yeats, 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae', *Mythologies*, p. 346



proposing a collective stratum of the unconscious<sup>70</sup> and in asserting that psychic conflict can lead to vision as well as hysteria.<sup>71</sup> Yeats's antithetical self, or Daimon, is close enough to Jung's Shadow, unconscious complexes constituted as the counterpart of the Ego, while both an interpretation of alchemy as a spiritual and psychological process and an acceptance that phenomena without apparent rational explanation should neither be violated by reductive dogma nor foolishly ignored to preserve the integrity of a system led both men to be regarded as controversial or even eccentric thinkers. The congruence of their ideas is unsurprising given their common interests in Theosophy and its roots in occult and underground currents with common sources in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.<sup>72</sup> It is significant that both of them were working them out in such similar ways and at the same time, although apparently entirely without reference to each other.<sup>73</sup> Jung's work deals with many of the 'Faustian' themes under discussion in this thesis.

The Jungian model of the psyche presupposes that the Ego, a complex of the conscious mind, rests on and is susceptible to the unconscious contents. The Ego is therefore the subject of consciousness. The unconscious contents consist of three categories: what can be

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<sup>70</sup> See above, pp. 150 & 153. Yeats's ideas on archetypes and the collective unconscious, and their possible powers, are most thoroughly worked out in the essay 'Magic' (1901) (*Collected Works* VI, pp. 23-54). He adduces the same arguments which were to be used by Jung, that archetypes emerge perfect in every detail from people who could neither have heard nor read about them.

<sup>71</sup> Yeats, 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae', *Mythologies*, p. 341

<sup>72</sup> The origins of Jung's thinking are charted in some detail by Richard Noll in *The Jung Cult*, though his account is disfigured, for non-German readers in particular, by tendentious use of German-language terms like '*völkisch*'. Although he correctly identifies a common source of ideas which interested 'irrationalists' and 'neo-pagans', some of whom were proto-Fascist thinkers, Noll carefully distances himself from any suggestion that Jung might have been a Nazi sympathizer (e.g. pp. 19f.), an idea which, according to J. B. Priestley, began as "an ugly little campaign to discredit him" just after the war (Priestley, 'Books in General', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 30 Oct 1954, p. 541). Yeats himself was not immune to the blandishments of Fascism, nor, more famously was Ezra Pound. Both Shaw and Wells admired Mussolini for a time. Noll implies that the rejection of conventions of religious or scientific orthodoxy can result in cataclysm. My argument is that it is the *reification* of such ideas in 'single vision' that is most dangerous, and that this is equally possible under a materialist orthodoxy such as Stalinist Marxism.

<sup>73</sup> Maddox (*George's Ghosts*, p. 5) suggests that "Yeats had read Jung" but provides no further details on what he might have read and when. Foster (*W. B. Yeats: A Life*) refers generically to Yeats's interest in 'Freud and Jung', but Jung's publications on the collective unconscious, alchemy, Gnosticism, etc. all postdate Yeats's writings on the subjects. Jung's works make no reference either to the relevant publications by Yeats. James Olney, noting the similarities in the two men's work, argues that they are both 'esoteric blossoms' from a common stem, or 'rhizome' in Plato (Olney, 'The Esoteric Flower: Yeats and Jung', Harper (Ed.), *Yeats and the Occult*, pp. 17-54). There is, of course, some truth in this, but the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition that influenced both men goes far beyond what can be found in Plato.

A similar curious lack of contact exists between both Yeats and Jung and the other ex-Theosophist working in the South German / Swiss region, Rudolf Steiner. His Anthroposophy carries many Gnostic / Hermetic ideas that are observable today in the ethos of Steiner schools, the holism of Anthroposophic medicine, which empys homeopathy, or scepticism towards technology.



remembered voluntarily, what has been repressed (a personal unconscious) and a foundation of innate universals (a collective unconscious) termed by Jung archetypes. The archetypes are neither things nor ideas, but paths of imagery comparable to the matrices of crystalline growth.<sup>74</sup> Direct contact with the involuntary unconscious is often primarily established through the Shadow, aspects of the unconscious experienced as contrary to the conscious attitude and thus repressed. Mephistopheles can be seen as the 'dark brother' or 'dark sister' of Faust.<sup>75</sup>

Aspects of the unconscious are *projected*, that is, they appear to consciousness as something outside the Ego, either as a concrete reality, a myth, a transcendental intuition, or as the apparent character of an other on which a Shadow or image has been superimposed. It can be seen that this corresponds to the Gnostic myth of the creation, both in the concept of hypostatization and the story of humanity falling in love with its own image reflected in nature.<sup>76</sup> Projection tends to occur when enough emotional charge ('numinosity') collects in an unconscious content to make it spring across into consciousness. However, this involves a peculiar danger:

The unconscious no sooner touches us than we *are* it — we become unconscious of ourselves. That is the age-old danger, intuitively known and feared by primitive man, who himself stands so very close to this pleroma. [...] All men's strivings have therefore been directed towards the condition of consciousness. This was the purpose of rite and dogma: they were dams and walls to keep back the dangers of the unconscious, the "perils of the soul".<sup>77</sup>

The consequence of that is that the patterns we impose on reality are indistinguishable from reality itself.

Apart from projections, the patterns of the unconscious emerge in dreams and in the forms of the imagination. Therefore, by contrast with the conscious psyche, these do not

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<sup>74</sup> "With regard to the definiteness of the form, our comparison with the crystal is illuminating inasmuch as the axial system determines only the stereometric structure but not the concrete form of the individual crystal." (Jung, 'The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious', *Collected Works* 9 (i), p. 80). The Jungian concept of the archetype has often been misunderstood, and his thought in general has frequently been misrepresented. Robert Steele has suggested this is because his work was "antithetical to the spirit of his age": "He was renewing for our times a world-view which, while always having had its adherents, has never been pre-eminent in Western culture. We are rarely taught in school about the gnostics or alchemists, nor do most of us read 'Faust' or study Nietzsche's 'Zarathustra'. Jung's work is difficult to read because our schools — those purveyors of the Zeitgeist — simply do not prepare us to read texts born of a tradition which has been outside the central current of Western thought." (Steele, *Freud and Jung: Conflicts of Interpretation*, p. 310)

<sup>75</sup> The Shadow can be experienced most easily "for its nature can in large measure be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious". (Jung, 'Aion', *Collected Works* 9 (ii), p. 8)

<sup>76</sup> Jung, *Collected Works* 9 (i), p. 59



operate by the laws of the rational intellect but according to 'dream-logic', as symbol, image, rhythm and music. According to Jung they also tend to constellate in pairs of contraries or opposites such as male / female, above / below, white / black, which are then arranged as quaternities. The Gnostic / Hermetic tradition is full of such quaternities. Typically, because they are opposites, the conscious mind finds it difficult to reconcile them; consciousness involves splitting and distinguishing. Therefore, a part of the pair or quaternity takes on an inferior function, disadvantaged by the conscious attitude, and as a result out of control within the unconscious. This, typically, happened to 'evil' within a Christian environment (repressed as 'the Devil'), the subjective imagination within objective scientific 'single vision', and the feminine within a 'masculine' culture of conquistadorial power. Jung interpreted the *opus* of alchemy, so central to the Gnostic / Hermetic conception, as the work of a life, the task of reintegrating the 'inferior' aspects of the psyche to create a truly balanced quaternity in which the unconscious is integrated with consciousness.<sup>78</sup> Such a balanced whole, which Jung now saw symbolized as a mandala image, he termed the Self (contrasting with the limited Ego), and the process of integration he called individuation. Any work with the creative imagination analagous to this process could be seen to have a similar function.<sup>79</sup>

The numinous power of the archetypes emerging from the unconscious makes them appear to be gods or goddesses, or figures and events of myth. According to the circumstances of their emergence they take on either a positive or negative charge, thus becoming either a glorious vision or a threatening nightmare. They also become entangled with other archetypal constellations,<sup>80</sup> so that the archetype of the Anima is implicated in the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 22

<sup>78</sup> In 'Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy' ('Psychology and Alchemy', *Collected Works* 12, pp. 38-223), Jung analysed 59 of a series of 400 dreams, the first section of a collection of over a thousand, to draw attention to the striking parallels that exist between these modern dreams "coming from a young man of excellent scientific education" and the traditional symbols of alchemy, culminating in the harmonious 'Great Vision' of a world clock. He demonstrates how the psyche approaches this mandala of wholeness "spiral-wise round a centre, gradually getting closer", an image which recalls Yeats's gyres. It has subsequently become clear that the dreamer was in fact Wolfgang Pauli, with whom Jung later formed a life-long friendship.

<sup>79</sup> Jung's detailed study of the alchemical process, which he subtitled 'An inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy', was published as *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (*Collected Works* 14). In this book, Jung wrote, "my psychology was at last given its place in reality and established upon its historical foundations." (Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 248)

<sup>80</sup> It was, for instance, suggested earlier that Mephistopheles took on characteristics of the Shadow and the Anima archetypes, but also of Mercurius, the trickster guide and messenger of the unconscious.



Mother and vice versa, or the Animus with the Father. The Anima / Animus is usually involved in the erotic lure towards projection, but simultaneously in the process of reintegrating unconscious contents.<sup>81</sup>

During the process of individuation there are twin dangers: that the Ego is assimilated by the Self so that the image of wholeness remains unconscious and the relativity of space-time within the unconscious distorts consciousness, or on the other hand that the Self is assimilated to the Ego, explaining the unconscious in purely rational terms, which tends to devalue its effects and create a sterile 'inflation' of the Ego. Both effects can be observed in Faustus. If, however, the process of individuation were to be successful and integration were to be achieved — which implies an 'impossible' balance between the 'real' and the imaginary, it would become possible to gather the psychic forces of the quaternity within the magic circle of the mandala. The representation of this state is indistinguishable from that of the divine:

Unity and totality stand at the highest point on the scale of objective values because their symbols can no longer be distinguished from the *imago Dei*. Hence all statements about the God-image apply also to the empirical symbols of totality.<sup>82</sup>

This clearly implies congruity with the Gnostic / Hermetic belief in the intimate relation between humanity and divinity,<sup>83</sup> identifying the source of Kant's transcendental imagination, for the resources available through the imagination are not those of a solipsistic Ego, but the innate paths of the collective unconscious,<sup>84</sup> opening in individual perception from time to eternity and through perception of the material to areas beyond the constraints of the usual laws of material reality (*on kai me on*). This image of the divine is both within the individual, as part of the psyche (the microcosm), and yet as immeasurably beyond it as

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<sup>81</sup> "The projection-making factor is the anima, or rather the unconscious as represented by the anima." (Jung, 'Aion' *Collected Works*, 9 (ii), p. 13) The role of Helen for Faustus or Simon Magus, and of Ariel for Prospero, are illustrative of this principle.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 31. Jung is not more explicit than this about the implications, prompting William Golding, for one, to comment that he was 'ducking the question' of whether there is a God or not (Baker, 'An Interview with William Golding' *Twentieth Century Literature* 28, 1982, p. 131). Just as the alchemists, however, refused to be precise about the *lapis*, Jung is, I feel, not prevaricating but being as precise as it is possible to be.

<sup>83</sup> Noll correctly identifies this implication of deification in the section of his book entitled 'Jung becomes a God' (Noll, *The Jung Cult*, pp. 209-17); ironically his tone of shocked disapproval of this 'blasphemy' against conventional religion and 'twentieth-century science' echoes the reaction of the established Church to the Gnostics, or the community of 'single vision' to heterodox views of realism.

<sup>84</sup> This collective unconscious comprises the phylogenetic and ontogenetic totality of humanity and the totality of the created world, It is a 'community' of all creation with aspects stretching into both past and



the universe itself; it is the Gnostic vision taken up by Pico della Mirandola, Ficino, Paracelsus and Blake.

A central question now obviously arises. Since the Gnostic / Hermetic cosmos represented by these visionaries and alchemists implied the possibility of magical interaction between the Magus and the material world, how might this be described in terms of the model developed in Jungian psychology?

After hesitating for many years, Jung finally published his revolutionary paper 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle', coupled, crucially, with Wolfgang Pauli's essay on Kepler and Fludd, in 1952. This linkage was important. Pauli was a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, a friend of Bohr and Heisenberg, who had played a major part in the development of quantum mechanics, a branch of science which had showed convincingly that at the sub-atomic level the Newtonian laws did not strictly apply. In particular, it became clear that different observers could observe the same event in contradictory ways, and that it was no longer possible to make the observed independent of the observer. The effects of this are best known to non-physicists in the humorous paradox of Schrödinger's cat.<sup>85</sup> So the collaboration between Pauli and Jung suggested ways in which Cartesian dualism, the origin of the gulf between the mind (and imagination) and matter (empirical reality) might be bridged. Pauli had impeccable scientific credentials; he was also sympathetic to Jungian ideas, having been the dreamer of the 'alchemical' dreams Jung had used in his comparison of alchemy with individuation. In the event, the final form of Jung's paper was strongly influenced by the dialogue between the two men.<sup>86</sup>

By contrast with 'synchronism', the simultaneous occurrence of two events, Jung uses 'synchronicity' to mean "a coincidence in time of two or more causally unrelated events which have the same or a similar meaning".<sup>87</sup> This covers all those strange 'coincidences' which occur far more often than the laws of chance would permit — the kind of experience we usually brush aside with uneasy amusement. In the introduction to this thesis there is the

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future, focused through perception in consciousness allowing it to seem personal, therefore to be identified as an image of 'God'.

<sup>85</sup> Erwin Schrödinger imagines a sub-atomic experiment set up in a box containing a cat, so that seen in one way the cat would survive, whereas in the other it would die. His paradox was published in 1935.

<sup>86</sup> See Meyer (Ed.), *Wolfgang Pauli und C. G. Jung: Ein Briefwechsel 1932-1958*, pp. 34-85. In particular the final form of the 'quaternity' below was Pauli's suggestion.

<sup>87</sup> Jung, 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle', *Collected Works* 8, p. 441



example of thunder and lightning interrupting our performance of *Doctor Faustus* at the moment Faustus is carried down to hell.<sup>88</sup> Jung offers several examples of the phenomenon from his own experience, including a series of fish-related coincidences which occurred while he was writing about fish symbolism, and, a favourite of mine, a story he quotes from Flammarion about M. de Fortgibu and the plum-pudding.<sup>89</sup> Among Pauli's friends the so-called 'Pauli effect', the tendency of any experiment he was associated with to come to grief, was proverbial.<sup>90</sup>

These phenomena are most suggestive when they are accompanied by psychological affects involving a heightened state of awareness associated with, for example, a period of crisis or ecstasy. Instances of synchronicity then also include phenomena usually regarded as 'extra-sensory perception' such as pre-cognition, telepathy or omens.<sup>91</sup> Jung draws attention to the effects in the ESP-experiments of J. B. Rhine (which involved guessing figures on cards and rolling dice) of failing interest — a tendency for the synchronicities to fall back towards the average predictable by the laws of chance — to stress that synchronicity either accompanies, or produces, a numinous sense of awe. Quoting Albertus Magnus: "Whoever would learn the secret of doing and undoing these things must know that everyone can influence everything magically if he falls into a great excess,"<sup>92</sup> Jung shows

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<sup>88</sup> Introduction, p. 7. It should be borne in mind how difficult it would be to synchronize these events deliberately.

<sup>89</sup> "A certain M. Deschamps, when a boy in Orléans, was once given a piece of plum-pudding by a M. de Fortgibu. Ten years later he discovered another plum-pudding in a Paris restaurant, and asked if he could have a piece. It turned out, however, that the plum-pudding was already ordered — by M. de Fortgibu. Many years afterwards M. Deschamps was invited to partake of a plum-pudding as a special rarity. While he was eating it he remarked that the only thing lacking was M. de Fortgibu. At that moment the door opened, and an old, old man in the last stages of disorientation walked in: M. de Fortgibu, who had got hold of the wrong address and burst in on the party by mistake." (Jung, 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle', *Collected Works* 8, p. 431) An example of synchronicity impressed J. B. Priestley greatly. Graham Sutherland gave him and his wife a painting of a grasshopper as a present. On the day they first hung it in their first-floor bedroom they found a grasshopper in the bed.

<sup>90</sup> Peat (*Synchronicity*, p. 30 in the German translation) cites Prof. J. Franck, when a complicated piece of apparatus broke in his Göttingen laboratory, writing to Pauli to say it could not have been the Pauli-effect as Pauli lived in Zürich, only to receive Pauli's reply that the train taking him to Copenhagen had been standing at Göttingen station at the very moment of the mishap.

<sup>91</sup> Because of their anecdotal quality, cases of synchronicity seldom convince those who have not experienced them, or successfully ignore them. Precognition is usually dismissed as chance or superstitious imagination. Among numerous cases from my own experience I would mention a poem I wrote under an odd sense of compulsion about a visit to the Guyanese poet Martin Carter two years previously. By the time the poem was finished I had become convinced that it prefigured his death, and I mentioned this to a number of people at the time. I received the news of his death three weeks later.

<sup>92</sup> Jung, 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle', *Collected Works* 8, p. 448



how closely related the concept of synchronicity is to magic, divination, superstition and the power of prayer.

The point to stress about synchronicity is that it does not obey the laws of causality: it contradicts the mechanistic principles underlying 'single vision' that for every discrete effect there must be a physical cause preceding it in time, or the corollary that any other apparently connected events should obey the laws of chance. Work in the 20th century, such as quantum mechanics at the subatomic level, or investigations of highly complex phenomena like turbulence, weather-systems or stock-markets, or singularities in cosmology, shows that mechanistic models of the universe have limitations,<sup>93</sup> in addition to which perception, dependent on physical senses, selection of data and problems, culture and language will impose limits on understanding.<sup>94</sup> Peat surveys these limitations in his book on synchronicity,<sup>95</sup> but stresses himself that attempts to relate the idea of synchronicity to physics are in danger of ending in reductionist explanation in terms of the physical laws of the material world it so effectively evades. Jung, by contrast, saw it as a "new conceptual language"<sup>96</sup> which could reconcile the workings of the psyche with the material reality by *meaning*, in a quaternity of universal principles:

constant connection through effect

(causality)

indestructible energy

space-time continuum

inconstant connection through contingency, equivalence, or "meaning"

(synchronicity)<sup>97</sup>

The connection we have noted with magic prompts the question of the extent to which synchronicity is available as a conscious agency. Is it, in other words, 'magical causality' which a Magus, by ritual, concentration, purification and intuition could use by an operation of the conscious will, or is it 'transcendental meaning' proceeding from and in harmony with a deeper pattern of meaning based on the collective unconscious? This is the solution

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<sup>93</sup> The discovery of the principles underlying complex 'non-linear' structures, misleadingly termed 'chaos' theory, is presented with admirable clarity in Gleick, *Chaos*. Other important studies of self-ordering structures are those by Prigogine and Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*, and Hayles (ed.), *Chaos and Order*, which is also concerned with their implications for literature.

<sup>94</sup> Pauli's essay on Kepler and Fludd anticipates the writings of Iragaray and Hayles on this theme.

<sup>95</sup> See esp. chapters 2-5.

<sup>96</sup> Jung, 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle', *Collected Works* 8, p. 512



favoured by Jung.<sup>98</sup> It is an interpretation that would accord with other observable facts about the unconscious and its archetypes: their numinous power, their irrationality, their independence of the laws of space and time, but also their trickster quality through their use of mask, ambiguity, pun and projection, recalling the celebrated tendency of oracles to fulfil themselves in unexpected ways.<sup>99</sup> For Faustus too the spirits will give "more than thou hast wit to ask".

Jung realized that synchronicity might also be the principle behind the coincidences of character and biography with astrological conjunctions and oppositions so important for the casting of horoscopes (which Kepler firmly believed in), or behind the Chinese divinatory oracle the *I Ching*, the Book of Changes. Needham, in discussing the *I Ching*, points to the two main principles enshrined within it, and their different effects. The first is the constant flux of Yin and Yang, feminine and masculine, dark and light, each containing its opposite in a 'recessive' state, and the second the principle of 'correlative thinking', which had important consequences:

Instead of observing successions of phenomena, the (ancient) Chinese registered alterations of aspects. If two aspects seemed to them to be connected, it was not by means of a cause and effect relationship, but rather 'paired' like the obverse and the reverse of something, or to use a metaphor from the Book of Changes, like echo and sound, or shadow and light.<sup>100</sup>

These correlations or resonances form part of a 'pattern' described as 'Tao', which is not obedience to a law but the co-operation of an organism, with all the parts acting "in accord with their own natures and functions".<sup>101</sup> The Tao, described by Richard Wilhelm as "a borderline conception lying at the extreme edge of the world of appearances"<sup>102</sup> is:

Impalpable, incommensurable,  
Yet within it are entities.<sup>103</sup>

Thus it can be compared with the 'Seignior of Faust' or the paradox of 'Scarborough Fair'. It both is and is not:

The Uncarved Block, though seemingly of small account,

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 514 (adapted)

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 483

<sup>99</sup> One thinks of the oracle for Oedipus, or in Shakespeare the witches' prophecy for Macbeth, or the augury foretelling that Henry IV "should not die but in Jerusalem". A similar story is told of Pauli, who having spent many years fascinated by the fine structure constant  $1/137$ , on being given the hospital room number 137 prophesied that he would never leave it, and died shortly afterwards.

<sup>100</sup> Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* 2, pp. 290f.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 290

<sup>102</sup> Jung, 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle', *Collected Works* 8, p. 487

<sup>103</sup> Lao-Tzu, quoted in Jung, 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle', *Collected Works* 8, p. 488



Is greater than anything under heaven.<sup>104</sup>

This reads like an alchemist's description of the *lapis*, and Needham points to numerous parallels between this view of the world and the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition, particularly in Agrippa, Paracelsus and Fludd.<sup>105</sup> He also notes the irony that Leibniz derived the idea of a binary mathematical system, the foundation of information technology, from reports of missionaries on the principles of Yin and Yang (a principle which was no special hindrance to the development of a 'modern' science in China), whereas the correlative thinking associated with the *I Ching*, at first a "mischievous handicap",<sup>106</sup> preventing rational explanations of nature as it became fossilized in a bureaucratic social order, finally came into its own so that "... Europe (or rather, by then, the world) was able to draw upon a mode of thinking very old, very wise, and not characteristically European at all."<sup>107</sup>

The student of literature should have far less difficulty with the idea of synchronicity than the scientist or philosopher. It is a familiar principle of patterning which, because of the hegemony of a 'single vision' idea of reality, has often been regarded as purely aesthetic or merely symbolic and thus inimical to mimetic realism. After Jung, however, it was possible to return to synchronicity in a new light. What had previously seemed a structural device now takes on the 'truth' of reality. A work which was even designed to illustrate the workings of synchronicity is J. B. Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls*,<sup>108</sup> in which a man named Goole, claiming to be a police inspector, interrogates the smug upper-class Birling family and their guest, the daughter's fiancé, about the suicide of a girl they first claim not to know. Gradually it becomes clear that, contrary to Birling's principles that "a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and..."<sup>109</sup> (which is the precise point at which the inspector arrives), each of them is in fact responsible for the girl's death. The inspector, who could be described as a messenger from the unconscious, a kind of angel, leaves them with the words: "We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 488

<sup>105</sup> Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* 2, p. 296

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 336

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 303

<sup>108</sup> Priestley was keenly interested in Jung's work. In 1946 he broadcast 'Description of a Visit to Carl Jung', which Jung praised as a "masterpiece" (Jung, *Briefe* 2, p. 51). Priestley's admiring review of several volumes of Jung's collected works ends with a reference to their covers: "covers that are a greeny-turquoise, like a deep sea in clear sunlight." ('Books in General', *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 Oct 1954, p. 542)



you that the time will come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish."<sup>110</sup> After the inspector's departure, though the younger people are impressed, the older ones use logic and realism to discover that neither was there a real inspector nor even a suicide. But the 'false resurrection' ends when the telephone rings and a police inspector investigating a girl's suicide is announced. Priestley, commenting on the letters he received about this play, said, "They all want to know who the first inspector is. But the really interesting question is not the identity of the first inspector, but of the second."<sup>111</sup> The full implication of this is hard to grasp. If the message of the unconscious is not heeded, real events in the form of synchronicity will impose a true pattern of meaning.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Priestley, 'An Inspector Calls', *The Plays* III, p. 274

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 311. It is interesting that Priestley, who receives special mention from George Lamming in *In the Castle of My Skin*, should have taken up the theme of angels, so vitally present in the work of postcolonial writers as diverse as Wilson Harris (*Angel at the Gate*), Salman Rushdie (*The Satanic Verses*), J. M. Coetzee (*Age of Iron*) and David Malouf (*Remembering Babylon*).

<sup>111</sup> J. B. Priestley in conversation with me, 1978.

<sup>112</sup> In 'An Inspector Calls' the selfishness, prejudice and injustice of the Birlings are intimately related to the social and historical events of their time. Set in 1912, the play refers to the *Titanic*, in which a microcosm of European and American society sailed blindly and smugly into a catastrophe, so intimately connected in meaning with the cataclysm of the First World War. The play was written at the end of the Second World War, under the impression of the full horrors of Nazism and Stalinism.

Synchronicity of a similar type turns up as a coda to the last great resurgence of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition during the 1960s, which collapsed very like the Romantic movement before it. Almost parodistically, when the movement was already in its death-throes in 1969, it was hyped for commercial purposes through the Woodstock Festival as the 'Woodstock Generation' who would be able to live with 'peace, music and love'. Shortly afterwards, a similar concert took place in the birthplace of 'Flower Power', San Francisco, where Mick Jagger said, "It's creating a sort of microcosmic society, you know, which sets an example to the rest of America as to how one can behave in large gatherings." After he and the Rolling Stones had played 'Sympathy for the Devil', some of the Hell's Angels brought in as stewards stabbed a man with a gun to death in front of the stage.



## Part III

## Re-visioning Mutualities



## Chapter Seven

### The Fictional Fulcrum: Athol Fugard's *Dimetos*

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There is a large body of critical work on Athol Fugard, but surprisingly little about a play which was described by no less a critic than Harold Hobson, the 'discoverer' of *Godot*, as "the best play I have seen in Britain this year".<sup>1</sup> Indeed Hobson compared the play, when it came to London the following year, with *Waiting for Godot*:

That *Waiting for Godot* triumphed over contemporary critical and popular disapproval... is a good augury for what will eventually happen to Mr Fugard's *Dimetos*.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the fact remains that *Dimetos* was generally not well received. Hobson summed up the critical reaction: "it was received with dismay, and even obloquy".<sup>3</sup> Ned Chaillet wrote:

Athol Fugard's *Dimetos* made its first ill-fated appearance at the 1975 Edinburgh Festival, where a combination of poor acoustics, thick South African accents and the unexpected non-political nature of the play worked together to bring about general disappointment and denouncement.<sup>4</sup>

After a brief run in Nottingham, the play transferred to London with Paul Scofield as *Dimetos*, Yvonne Bryceland as Sophia, Ben Kingsley as Danilo, and Celia Quicke as Lydia. *Plays and Players* noted: "Fugard's strange play met with grim London indifference last month."<sup>5</sup>

The reason for the negative reaction from critics was not only poor acoustics on its Edinburgh first night but what Chaillet described as "*Sizwe Bansi* expectations". Fugard had after all made his name with pioneering work against the implicit and explicit structures of apartheid, culminating in collaborative projects with actors like John Kani and Winston Ntshona to produce *The Island*, *Statements after an Arrest*, or *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, which could be described as politically committed drama in the tradition of Grotowski and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 7 September, 1975

<sup>2</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 30 May, 1976

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Ned Chaillet, 'One Play Down', *Plays and Players*, 23 (August 1976), pp.26f.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27.



the African 'theatre of the dispossessed'.<sup>6</sup> Not that these plays were simplistic agit-prop pieces, but their powerful messages and improvisatory structure certainly appealed to audiences who expected and sympathized with postcolonial outrage, as long as its target was an unjust regime they could regard as alien, and thus ignore their own complicity in the history that had created it. In *Dimetos*, Fugard returned to working alone, presenting his actors with a more or less completed script which lacked the 'hard political clarity' of the preceding plays. In addition, *Dimetos* has a haunting quality which Chaillet compared with Bergman's 'island' films, but which further confounded expectations, so that Robin Thornber, writing in the *Guardian* about the Nottingham run-in, while calling it a "stunning piece of theatre", cautioned: "Whether English audiences are prepared for such heavily symbolic, almost poetic theatre remains to be seen."<sup>7</sup> Gerald Weales calls *Dimetos* an 'anomaly' in Fugard's oeuvre, and by implication a regrettable one,<sup>8</sup> but his earlier dismissal of the play (in *Hollins Critic*) elicited the response from Fugard: "I am confident that it will prove itself with time." Russell Vandenbroucke, in a thought-provoking and sensitive chapter on *Dimetos*, suggests that it may even be one of Fugard's personal favourites, and that as an "underground classic" it may one day, in the right hands, be rescued from oblivion. Vandenbroucke's assertion that the play "insistently imposes itself upon the imagination as indelibly as it did upon Fugard's own"<sup>9</sup> certainly corresponds with my experience of the play and that of the students involved in our production of it.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, while *Dimetos* disappointed conventional postcolonial expectations by not being a mimetic representation of a struggle against colonialist structures<sup>11</sup> or the assertion of an indigenous tradition, Fugard was attempting a much more far-reaching and revisionary project, and one that he shares with other major writers such as Derek Walcott or Wilson

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<sup>6</sup> See Margarete Seidenspinner, *Exploring the Labyrinth*, pp. 68-80, 123-140, 169-171.

<sup>7</sup> Robin Thornber, *The Guardian*, 3 April, 1976

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Weales, 'Fugard Masters the Code' in *Twentieth Century Literature*, 39,4, 1993, p.503

<sup>9</sup> Vandenbroucke, *Truths the Hand Can Touch*, p. 159

<sup>10</sup> The production, an internal workshop at Maria Veen school, Germany, was acted in English by German students. A video of the production, sent to Fugard, elicited the response: "Thank you so very much for your letter and video-tape which have finally caught up with me — Bethesda is a tiny & very remote little village to which I withdraw, *Dimetos* style, to write. Fortunately a farmer friend has a T.V. set and player so I was able to watch your production with intense fascination & appreciation. I owe you a deep debt of gratitude for your sensitive response to my play. I can pay you know (*sic*) better compliment than to say: I recognised the play I wrote. That doesn't happen all that often. Please let your talented cast know of my response." Letter to the author, 7 Nov 1991.



Harris: the reactivation of the underground tradition of the Gnostic / Hermetic world view, which we have been following in the previous chapters, to show its intimate relation with the marginalized traditions the dominant imperialist culture had buried. Thus the play has rarely been discussed adequately in its full context, and though it is far from being a mere 'play of ideas', and indeed the conflicts and relationships between the characters are quite adequate to sustain it as a dramatic *tour de force*, the symbolic and philosophical dimensions on which it operates make it, I would argue, a far more significant work than it has yet been given credit for.

At this point it may be useful to give a brief summary of the plot of *Dimetos*. The engineer Dimetos has retired from an unnamed city to a small village in the country and refuses to engineer any more projects. He lives in retirement with his niece Lydia and his housekeeper Sophia. At the beginning of the play a horse has fallen into a well, and Dimetos, assisted by Lydia, gets it out. This involves Lydia being let down half-naked on to the horse's back and securing ropes round its body with only Dimetos' voice to guide her. Lydia is delighted to be able to work with her uncle and tries to imagine the feelings of the horse, but Dimetos explains that to haul the horse up the principles of physics are more important than stories.

Dimetos' seclusion is disturbed by an emissary from the city, Danilo, whose arrival proves a catalyst, as he is used by Dimetos in an experiment which reveals to Lydia her feelings of attraction to the newcomer, but also the depths of her uncle's passion for her. It is this passion which awakens Sophia's jealousy, destroying the trust between the two women. When she understands the full extent of the conflicts into which she has fallen, Lydia hangs herself.

In the second act, set by the sea-shore, Danilo's second visit to see if any kind of divine justice has overtaken Dimetos prompts Sophia to reveal to Dimetos the extent of his selfishness, as he appears ignorant that Lydia's despair followed her abandonment by Sophia. Dimetos and Sophia are tormented by the stench of some sea-creature on the rocks, which Dimetos cannot remove. He is unable to use his hands any longer. At the point where

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<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*, p. 183



he admits that he can do nothing with his engineering skills, the voice of Lydia comes to him, telling him to make new tools, those of a story.

Fugard, in a programme note to the original production, describes the genesis of *Dimetos* in a *carnet* entry by Camus, which he quotes:

Dimetos had a guilty love for his niece, who hanged herself. One day, the little waves carried on to the fine sand of the beach the body of a marvellously beautiful young woman. Seeing her, Dimetos fell on his knees, stricken with love. But he was forced to watch the decay of this magnificent body, and went mad. This was the niece's vengeance, and the symbol of a condition we must try to define.<sup>12</sup>

It is possible to gain a unique insight into the way Fugard's plays germinate from such small seeds and what other factors contribute to their growth by reading his *Notebooks*, which he sees as a "constant literary exercise which I hoped would lead to greater accuracy in expression" and as a source book for ideas which he developed in the plays: "everything is reflected there".<sup>13</sup> In asking Mary Benson in 1979 to edit the notebooks for publication, Fugard was clearly marking them as signposts for a clearer understanding of his work. From the *Notebooks* we learn that in December 1963, while spending summer days by the sea, Fugard had re-read Camus' *Carnets* (given to him by his wife in 1961, the year his father died and his daughter was born). Fugard writes: "When I first read his note on Dimetos I was excited and immediately thought of it as the germinal idea of a play. Yesterday I remembered it."<sup>14</sup> In an earlier entry he describes the influence of Camus while reading the *Carnets*:

Reading Camus is like finding, and for the first time, a man speaking my own language.

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Gray (ed.), *Athol Fugard*, p. 63. Camus does not give a source, and Fugard writes in the note that he gave up trying to find out more about Dimetos after a cursory search drew a blank. Roscher in the *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, (Leipzig: Teubner, 1884-6), Vol 1, columns 1020f., writes: "Dimoites, Bruder des Troizen, dessen Tochter Enopis er heiratete. Enopis erhängte sich wegen verbrecherischer Liebe, die sie mit ihrem Bruder gepflogen, aus Furcht und Scham, nachdem sie zuvor dem Dimoites, der ihr Verbrechen ihrem Vater mitgeteilt, geflücht hatte. Nach nicht langer Zeit traf dieser eine von den Wellen ausgestoßene weibliche Leiche von großer Schönheit, und von Liebe ergriffen mißbrauchte er dieselbe. Als diese darauf in Verwesung übergang, und er ihr einen hohen Grabhügel aufgeworfen hatte, erstach er sich auf demselben, da die Leidenschaft nicht nachlassen wollte." (Dimoites, the brother of Troizen, whose daughter Enopis he married. Enopis hanged herself through fear and shame because of her forbidden love-affair with her brother, after Dimoites, who told her father about her crime, had first cursed her. Not long afterwards he came upon a female corpse of great beauty washed up by the waves, and seized by love he abused it. When the body started to decay and he had raised a high burial mound for it he stabbed himself because his passion would not abate. — my translation) Richard Whitaker, in an article 'Dimoetes to Dimetos: the Evolution of a Myth' (*English Studies in Africa*, 24,1, 1981, pp. 45-59) adds that the myth as found in Parthenius originates with Phylarchus; he compares the original with the Camus and Fugard versions in detail.

<sup>13</sup> Fugard, *Notebooks 1960/77*, p. 8

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 107



This quotation from his notebooks: 'The misery and greatness of this world: it offers no truths, only objects for love.'

'Absurdity is King, but love frees us from it.'<sup>15</sup>

In 1965, again by the sea, Fugard described a seal struggling on to rocks during a storm. Fugard was struck by the 'primordial beauty' of the apparently dying animal seen against the background of the violent open sea. The seal later recovered and swam away. At the end of 1971 Fugard was thinking about the *Dimetos* story again,<sup>16</sup> and in October 1972 under the heading *Dimetos* he noted down the images of a man emptying beachcombing from his pocket and a rotting seal carcase. The play itself began to be written in February 1975, commissioned by the Edinburgh Festival. A number of entries then accompany the writing and staging of the play in 1975-76.

The notebooks are full of events which Fugard observed in real life, but which, had they been taken over in plays, would have seemed embarrassingly laden with symbolic significance. After the October 1972 reference to *Dimetos* there is a description of a derelict school where *Sizwe Bansi* was being rehearsed. The door of the boys' lavatory became jammed shut, and when it was repaired days later a weed had seeded itself in a crack in the urinal and turned into a healthy plant. Clearly the *Notebooks* had to be used with care as 'reality' in the form of synchronicity was producing highly unrealistic symbolic material. At other times events metamorphose more happily into images for the play: the image of Fugard's daughter on a horse "stunned with happiness",<sup>17</sup> a dead shark on a rock echoing the earlier seal,<sup>18</sup> descriptions of the sea and sky, and the act of fishing as a correlative of the creative process: "a small repetitive dance between the limits of Life and Death, Yin and Yang, the active and the passive... black rock, white sea... known and unknown... the fishing line, with its baited barb unreeling from one into the other."<sup>19</sup> In May 1973 Fugard wrote: "A powerful sense of the unconscious trying to talk... improvising, making a vocabulary of the externals that impinge on my life each day... re-assembled, loaded each night so as to convey meaning."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 94

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 195

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 208

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 209

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 206

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 210



Apart from external events, the *Notebooks* permit inferences to be drawn about ideas which interested Fugard at various times. The names of Camus, Sartre and Beckett recur frequently.<sup>21</sup> The *Notebooks* also reveal that shortly before *Dimetos* was written, Fugard had been reading R. D. Laing, Marshall McLuhan, and more significantly for this argument, C. G. Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*,<sup>22</sup> and Theodore Roszak's *Where the Wasteland Ends*.<sup>23</sup> These, taken with the Blake epigraph which is printed at the beginning of the Oxford edition of *Dimetos* offer a revealing context for a study of the play.

In *Where the Wasteland Ends*, Roszak presents a comprehensive critique of urban / industrial society, showing how it is intellectually bankrupt and a cul-de-sac of consumption. Urban / industrial society culminates in 'megapolis', which destroys cities as much as the wilderness, creating expectations of artificial worlds and simulacra (theme parks) seen by consumers as superior to the real environment. In this Roszak can be regarded as belonging to the avant-garde of commentators on what came to be known as the postmodern condition. In the service of the megalopolitan ideal, societies have organized themselves into technocracies run by teams of experts and engineers in which the good life is made to depend on ever-increasing consumerism.<sup>24</sup> Roszak divides these into the 'suave technocracies' (US, Western Europe, Japan) with major stable corporations using the power of employment, PR and mass media to make the status quo seem ideal, the 'vulgar technocracies' of the communist blocs, the 'teratoid technocracies' which depend on the use of torture to function (South America, South Africa) and the 'comic opera technocracies', which are the emerging

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<sup>21</sup> The references to Beckett make it clear that he was fascinated and stimulated by works like *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, or *Malone Dies*. Far from seeing them as expressions of existentialist despair, he wrote: "Beckett has for me succeeded in 'making man naked again'. How to be clearer in what I mean? When it rains — the rain falls on the skin of Beckett's characters." (Ibid. p. 67. See also p. 68).

<sup>22</sup> June 1972: "Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* sustaining me a lot at the moment." (Ibid. p. 198)

<sup>23</sup> February 1976: I must not forget my enormous debt to Roszak's *Where the Wasteland Ends*, and how that book helped me to understand what I was trying to say. The strange coincidence of his Blake-Newton juxtaposition." (Ibid. p. 219). Most critics, even when they mention this work, appear not to have read it. Walder, who does refer to it, dismisses it as "a vague, rambling and unoriginal account".

<sup>24</sup> An idea later expanded by Lyotard in *La Condition Postmoderne* (1979): "Dans l'âge postindustriel et postmoderne, la science conservera et sans doute renforcera encore son importance dans la batterie des capacités productives des États-nations." (In the postindustrial and postmodern age science will keep and indeed reinforce its importance in the battery of productive capacities of nation-states.) (p. 15 — my translation) Lyotard's argument further echoes Roszak's (and indeed Fugard's) in seeing: "La science est d'origine en conflit avec les récits" (p.7) and that a mark of the postmodern is an increased scepticism with regard to 'métarécits', the frames within which stories can be confined.



postcolonial societies scrambling to imitate one or other of the first three.<sup>25</sup> For these he anticipates Salman Rushdie's coining of the word 'Coca-colonization'!<sup>26</sup> In spite of the staging of the Apollo moon landings as a quasi-religious apotheosis, the world, Roszak points out, is quite incapable of sustaining the necessary resources for this process to continue everywhere. The result — and here he seems to have been borne out by subsequent developments — will be a continuing minority elite portion of the world depending for its prosperity on the double bind of wealth-creation capitalism,<sup>27</sup> destroying the environment by growth or itself by an absence of growth while the rest of the world's nations slide into increasing debt and destitution in the attempt to mimic their new colonial masters. Caliban tries to counterfeit Prospero's magic, comments Roszak.

This world, Roszak maintains, is the product of 'single vision', a dependence on a 'scientific' perception of reality which we have investigated in detail in Chapter 5. The physical universe is systematized by a complex of immutable laws about what can and cannot exist; an irresistible bait consisting of the chance to manipulate the material world traps the intellect in single vision as the perceptible world is reified as a projection, emptied of the sacred, and given over to manipulation. Roszak uses the term 'idolatry' for this process. The soul is lost unnoticed.

Knowing what horrors follow when the discipline of the sacred has been lost, Blake could discern 'the spirit of evil in things heavenly' — bomb physics and the human guinea pigs of Buchenwald emerging from the worldview of Newton and Pasteur, the behavioural reductionism of Watson and Skinner springing from the humane aspirations of Bacon and Locke, the Frankensteinian nightmares of modern science and technics arising from Promethean dreams of glory.<sup>28</sup>

This single vision 'imperializes' the body, seeking for ways to hold time artificially while death replaces sex as taboo and the organic nature of the body is rejected in favour of incorruptible iconic youth. Quoting Leon Kass (in *Science*, November 9, 1971), Roszak returns the argument to the Renaissance Magus in a hollow echo of Pico della Mirandola's ringing declaration:

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<sup>25</sup> Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, pp. 42ff.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>27</sup> I am indebted to Antony Wilden, *System and Structure* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980, p.394), for this formulation, which sees capital as the principle of entropy: "Industrial capitalism is in a global double bind: if it stops producing for the sake of producing, it will destroy itself; if it goes on producing it will destroy us."

<sup>28</sup> Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, p. 414



We are witnessing the erosion, perhaps the final erosion, of the idea of man as something splendid or divine, and its replacement with a view that sees man no less than nature, as simply more raw material for manipulation and homogenization.<sup>29</sup>

Eventually, argues Roszak, only marginalized cultures and eclipsed traditions can offer hope of redemption to the psychic condition on which the technocracy is built. In an uncanny foreshadowing of J. M. Coetzee's vision in *Waiting for the Barbarians* he states: "The barbarian may be at the gate because the empire has decayed from within. He may even come to voice well-justified grievances which, for the good of our souls, we dare not ignore."<sup>30</sup> Whether this voice will be understood is by then doubtful, one should add.

In opposition to single vision and technocratic manipulation Roszak refers back to what he calls the 'Old Gnosis', by which he means the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition. He shows how this tradition can be traced from its obscure origins to Blake, Wordsworth and Goethe and on to Rimbaud and Joyce. He sees artists like these as prophetic of the uncaging of 'rhapsodic intellect', offering a perspective on a 'visionary commonwealth':

Our politics has become deeply psychological, a confrontation of sanities. But if our psychology is not itself to be debased by scientific objectification, then it must follow where liberated consciousness leads it; into the province of the dream, the myth, the visionary rapture, the sacramental sense of reality, the transcendent symbol.<sup>31</sup>

Besides these works specifically mentioned in the *Notebooks*, Vandenbroucke suggests that there are other literary ancestors of *Dimetos*, to which he devotes an appendix in his book. They include Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, *The Tempest*, and the *Faust* dramas by Goethe and Marlowe, although Vandenbroucke emphasises the differences between *Dimetos* and *Faust* rather than their similarities. Intuitively, though, Vandenbroucke is surely on the right track, as this thesis has argued. He singles out the attempt by Marlowe's Faustus to hold back time as an important parallel. It will be recalled from the chapter on *Doctor Faustus* that Martin Versfeld, in an important essay, stresses that the Faustian project described by Marlowe is frustrated by his unwillingness to accept 'things as they are' (*on kai me on*) and by the fact of time. It is therefore surely significant that Versfeld was teaching at Cape Town at the time Fugard was studying there, and indeed was singled out for mention by Fugard: "A very remarkable professor of ethics and political history called Martin Versfeld enabled me to interpret Sartre

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 252

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 206



and Kierkegaard and Heidegger."<sup>32</sup> *Dimetos* can be seen, then, as part of a continuing tradition of the drama of the Gnostic seeker carried into the new cross-cultural dimension of postcolonial writing.

The play is delicately and symmetrically balanced between the two poles of the first and final scenes, an ascent from a fall, on the fulcrum of Lydia's extraordinary suicide. Within these two halves, corresponding to the two acts, there are two moments of discovery where the action takes a significant turn, in the first act the scene after the meal (I,6) continuing into Lydia's waking the following morning (I,8), in the second it is the moment when Sophia's true significance is revealed (II,5). At each of these points a different dimension opens up and the nature of the dramatic conflict within the play changes.

The horse which has fallen down a well at the beginning appears to be a real horse and its rescue a mere problem of physics. In our production Lydia's successful efforts to calm the horse and tie ropes around it to prepare it to be lifted out takes place at the bottom of a funnel of light, down which Dimetos' disembodied calm and fatherly instructions can be heard as from a great distance. Dressed only in her underwear, Lydia is in intimate contact with the horse, her voice both brave and tender in that dark place, where otherwise only the regular dripping of water can be heard. The knot she is to tie to secure the horse, which will be significant later, serves to make her one with the animal in grace and physical beauty.

These attributes are stressed in the second scene, also played by Lydia without a dress; Lydia's unselfconscious erotic charm emerges from her pleasure, her enthusiasm, and the identification she achieves remembering the horse's liberation and in her song. She is flushed with the success of their combined efforts. Dimetos, cooler, the experienced and self-assured engineer, hides his feelings, as Lydia points out. Dimetos answers: "There wasn't that much to hide,"<sup>33</sup> thus introducing the contrast between them, Dimetos insisting that only 'facts' matter: the laws of gravity, of attraction between bodies, causing the horse to fall, and the "estimate of his weight and the breaking strength of these ropes" hung from "a system of pulleys with a mechanical advantage of five to one."<sup>34</sup> Dimetos, mocking Lydia's need to know a story by using the childish fairytale words 'once upon a time',

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 379

<sup>32</sup> Vandenbroucke, *Truths the Hand Can Touch*, p. 5

<sup>33</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 7



points out: "I'm an engineer, Lydia, not a story teller. An artisan, not an artist."<sup>35</sup> But the hiding of his feelings is also necessary as he tenderly dries her back with her dress, a highly charged if still veiled moment of eroticism suggesting a different kind of attraction between bodies, coupled in the play with the emphasis on their relationship — her embarrassment at having called him 'Dimetos' instead of 'Uncle', and his claim to equal status ("Dimetos and Lydia"). As in fairytale, the uncle-niece relationship stands for that between father and daughter, forbidden under the incest taboo implied by Camus' entry and the Greek original. This is confirmed when Dimetos says, "I love her as if she were my own child."<sup>36</sup> Dimetos can be compared with Prospero, and Lydia with both Miranda and Ariel, as Dimetos has needed Lydia as much to get the horse out of the well as Prospero needs Ariel to perform magic. The comparison is strengthened when Danilo is introduced to their isolation like Ferdinand on Prospero's island.

It is of course Dimetos' engineering skills which Danilo hopes to enlist in order to solve the problems of the 'city': "Unless a few things are done very quickly our 'bustling little metropolis' is going to be in very serious trouble,"<sup>37</sup> specifically through drought — a potent symbol in the Karoo where water is a life-giving force and its absence can stand for a spiritual as well as a material lack.<sup>38</sup> Dimetos is needed because he had a quality of 'vision', according to Danilo, though Dimetos himself has consciously withdrawn from the city in disillusionment. The reason he gives to Sophia is that he has stopped caring: the link between head, hands and heart has been broken. "Caring. Not the most exciting of words is it? Almost as humble as a tool. But that is the Alchemist's Stone of human endeavour."<sup>39</sup> Sophia herself knows how important Lydia is in this process. What Dimetos has lost is his inspiration and his imagination, the deepest source of human motivation.<sup>40</sup>

From Danilo's entry in I,3 onwards the question of whether Dimetos can be persuaded to return to the city becomes the apparent mainspring of the plot in Act I, with the tensions

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 7

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 7

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 18

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, *Pula* by Matsemela Manaka

<sup>39</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 17

<sup>40</sup> Walter Pagel asserts that: "All action is visualized by Paracelsus as flowing from an act of imagination — a process not connected with formal logical reasoning, but with the spirit-conscious or subconscious and in a



relating to Lydia forming the sub-plot. From this point, too, it becomes clear that the play is not a naturalistic one merely concerning the characters as people, but, as is appropriate to its mythic origins, uses the characters simultaneously to play out a drama of ideas.<sup>41</sup> The 'city' is not a specific city with defined problems but the urban / industrial complex described by Roszak or Mumford, the subject of a speculative meditation in I,6 between Dimetos and Danilo during the meal, in which the analogies of an organism with arteries flowing with life or a complex but controllable machine are rejected in favour of the image of a labyrinth, "the creation of a modern Daedalus into which Theseus has gone without his ball of twine."<sup>42</sup> Danilo redefines that labyrinth: "Man is the only animal to be trapped by time. That's the real labyrinth and to get out of it we have got to plan and build very fast, and bigger than before."<sup>43</sup> Koslowski, in his book *Die Prüfungen der Neuzeit*, shows that the end of the modernist master-narrative of progress coincides with the cultural realization of the meaning of the second law of thermodynamics — entropy — and the concept of time's arrow.<sup>44</sup> These in turn affect not only the illusions of infinite energy supply and boundless growth, but even the whole concept of apocalypse.<sup>45</sup> Attempts to escape by redoubling the speed with which 'progress' is made, which Koslowski terms 'supermodern', must be distinguished from what is truly 'postmodern', which, he maintains, is intimately connected with Gnosis: "Postmodernität heißt, die Innerlichkeit des Selbst, die Leiblichkeit des Geistes und die Weisheit in der Natur zu denken." (Postmodernity means thinking the inwardness of the self, the corporeality of spirit and the wisdom of nature)<sup>46</sup> The city's problems become more and more intractable<sup>47</sup> until the very fact of having vision causes despair and the need to withdraw from engagement with it. The crisis of the modernist project, visible from Yeats

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broad sense embracing all strata of the personality." (Pagel, *Paracelsus. An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, Basel: Karger, 1982, p. 111)

<sup>41</sup> This, I believe, is the sense in which Fugard meant "All my characters are me. I am all my characters." (*Notebooks*, p. 73)

<sup>42</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 22

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 23. This echoes the argument in Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, pp. 175-9, also connected with the *homo faber* theme Fugard is employing.

<sup>44</sup> Koslowski, *Die Prüfungen der Neuzeit*, p. 22

<sup>45</sup> See Freese, *From Apocalypse to Entropy and Beyond*

<sup>46</sup> Koslowski, *Die Prüfungen der Neuzeit*, p. 19

<sup>47</sup> Zygmund Baumann, in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) writes: "Most problems today confronting the managers of local orders are outcomes of the problem-solving activity. [...] Problems are created by problem-solving, new areas of chaos are generated by ordering activity. Progress consists first and foremost in the obsolescence of yesterday's solutions." (p. 14)



("The best lack all conviction...") to Beckett ("Nothing to be done.") culminates in the postmodernist rejection of the master-narrative of scientific progress and the confrontation with the monster, minotaur or harpy, in the inner labyrinth. Danilo himself, still an adherent of progress in Act I, will return in Act II with the belief that the metropolis has its origins in the necropolis and will return to being that.

In these terms the play appears to be about social responsibility. To what extent has Dimetos, and through him the writer himself, the right to withdraw from the social struggle for the sake of his own private artistic salvation? Indeed commentators have seen this as a central message of the play, coming as it does at a time when Fugard had decided to withdraw from the co-operative project with Serpent Players and to write as an individual, and moreover to choose an apparently personal topic at a time of extraordinary political upheaval.<sup>48</sup> Responsibility and commitment of the social type is what Danilo is pleading for when he reminds Dimetos of his angry words when confronted by a beggar; "Your hands can still work. You blaspheme them by begging," which made such an impression on Danilo: "Those few words made me realize what it meant to be a man among other men. A reciprocity, not of tears, but sweat." Dimetos comments: "A stirring vision."<sup>49</sup> But it is single vision, the project of Urizen, something which Dimetos is beginning to grasp, though he cannot yet see a way to escape from it. It is the vision that leads Danilo to see the episode with the horse merely as: "pulling old plough horses out of wells or being an odd-job man to a crowd of peasants".<sup>50</sup>

In this light Dimetos, the disillusioned manipulator of nature, clearly belongs in the tradition of the Magus, the Faust figure with his origins in Simon Magus and the Gnostic / Hermetic project of the imagination, attempting to fly in identification with the divine, but being lured by love into a belief in the reality of the material. Subject to that lure the horse of the imagination can find itself at the bottom of a very deep well, as Faustus does, recognizing that his lost 'soul', embodied in Helen, paradoxically the epitome of the lure of physical beauty itself, is the unreachable sole agent of his redemption. In that case Dimetos is not only Faustus and the Magus figures Faustus represents, but also Blake's Newton, the

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<sup>48</sup> e.g. Seidenspinner *Exploring the Labyrinth*, (passim), and Walder, *Athol Fugard*, pp. 96-100.

<sup>49</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 25

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 25



powerful Anthropos with the features of the artist lured into falling by the Urizenic project. He has become the engineer, in the service of the "six mechanical powers",<sup>51</sup> employer of knowledge-for-power according to the scheme outlined by Bacon. His very name 'Dimetos' now makes sense in relation to Blake's picture of Newton portrayed measuring with the dividing compasses, suggesting as it does the ability to divide (di-) and measure (met-), the essential tools in the process of logical consciousness by which the material world can be mastered.<sup>52</sup> Mastery also implies manipulation when applied to people treated as things by a man obsessed with his own individual need to win.<sup>53</sup>

It may be rewarding to submit the names of the other characters to a similar analysis. Danilo recalls the name Daniel, associated with judgement. As a catalyst, he demands decisions, explicitly from Dimetos about his return, but implicitly also from Lydia about her feelings for him, and beyond that from Dimetos about his own relationship with Lydia, which until that point had been latent and undefined. However, Danilo's need for such decisions and value-judgements is continually frustrated, as exemplified by his paradoxical admiration and contempt for the beautiful but meaningless wall which has cost two slaves their entire lifetimes,<sup>54</sup> or by his inability to finish his story of the old man to persuade Lydia, which was fulfilling its purpose "until you couldn't think of a question to ask him."<sup>55</sup> It is significant that the play's only joke:<sup>56</sup> "What's the difference between a duck?... One of its legs is both the same!"<sup>57</sup> a surrealistic meditation on judging difference and unity, though reportedly told by a local farmer, is put in the mouth of the somewhat drunken Danilo.

Sophia, the Greek word for wisdom and the Gnostic origin of the creation (consciousness) of the world but also, in its lack of completeness, of the imperfection of that world,<sup>58</sup> can be seen as Dimetos' intellect. She has been with Dimetos for a long time — since he was ten — as his housekeeper, so much so that he takes her entirely for granted. Nevertheless she has intimate knowledge of even the thoughts he is reluctant to admit to

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 17

<sup>52</sup> "Modern mastery is the power to divide, classify and allocate — in thought, in practice, in the practice of thought and in the thought of practice." Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> Sophia asks: "Is the sea obliging, Dimetos? Does it always let you win? As a little boy you would never play if there was a chance of losing." (Fugard, *Dimetos*, p.40)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 12

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 35

<sup>56</sup> One critic panned the London production of *Dimetos* at the Comedy Theatre for its lack of jokes.

<sup>57</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 32



himself: "Sometimes I know his own mind even before he does."<sup>59</sup> Her sensitivity extends below the surface of things to mere shadows, as becomes clear when she can sense what raises the hackles of dogs: "There's always something else isn't there, something more real... even if it's only a thought. It's all we know about them sometimes; and then, like dogs, raise our hackles and bark."<sup>60</sup> As Dimetos' intellect she is his 'dedicated servant', aware, able to observe, but not to influence his actions or inspire his passions. On the level of the 'real' action she is similarly powerless to take on the role she desires in Dimetos' life: "If I'm not a servant what am I? Mother? Sister? I'm not old enough for the first and I've never thought of myself as the second. There's also 'friend' 'companion'... if the others are too personal."<sup>61</sup> It does not even occur to Dimetos that she might wish to be the object of desire.

The name Lydia recalls the Lydian mode in music, the tender and feminine '*Ewig-Weibliche*' which Beethoven used so effectively in his String Quartet Op. 132. As was noted in Chapter 1 the Lydian stone was another name for the touchstone to determine true gold, or even for the Philosopher's Stone of the alchemists itself. As such she is closely related to Ariel, and to the archetype of the Anima / soul, the Helen who can be summoned up by Mephistopheles / Mercurius. She is the subtle dancer and the inspiration of the imagination (the rider of the horse Pegasus), whose numinous presence forbids physical possession. Her relationship with Sophia illustrates this perfectly. Their magical intimacy conjured up in the short scene of their 'game' (I,4) is pure alchemy, the revisioning and revaluing of each apparently ordinary object. "Do you know how to go to



Lydia (Julia Feise) and Sophia (Claudia Nienhoff), Maria Veen, 1991

heaven? We worked out a way. Ten beautiful..."<sup>62</sup> But at the moment when it becomes clear to both of them that Dimetos desires to possess Lydia, this trust is broken and the alchemy goes into reverse in one of the most shocking moments of the play:

<sup>58</sup> See Ch 1.

<sup>59</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 31

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 29

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 29f.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 46



SOPHIA [*mechanically*]. Butterfly... bird... rainbow...

LYDIA [*shaking her head*]. No...

SOPHIA. I saw a dead dog.

LYDIA. That's enough Sophia. Thank you.<sup>63</sup>

This exchange forms part of the revelatory Scene 8, when Lydia has woken from a dream screaming Dimetos' name. The dream clearly implies that Lydia herself realizes that her easy closeness with her uncle, which only the evening before had formed part of a moment of supreme happiness ("This is the happiest day of my life. I don't want it to end. First the horse, then a visitor, and now...")<sup>64</sup> is at an end. Her conversation with Sophia makes it clear that the question of Dimetos' return to the city, which she and the audience had thought to be the centre of the dramatic conflict, was never a serious possibility. The dramatic centre of gravity has now shifted to Dimetos' relationship with Lydia. Ironically, everything changes just after her words about happiness.

She has shown Dimetos the knot they used that morning, and has asked Dimetos to teach her a new one. In the image of the tying of knots lies Dimetos' dilemma: the role of inspiration she plays for him by the beauty of her physical presence is a lure to try to bind and possess her physically, which he knows he needs to resist if the relationship is to retain magic potency. In natural physical terms she is attracted to Danilo, who might be her expected sexual partner. And yet Dimetos is painfully aware of his own desire. As a sublimation Dimetos recalls the moment of rescue in the well, in a speech reminiscent of Prospero's recollection of Ariel's bondage and release. The gestures he makes while telling the story of the placing of the slings and of the "two bodies separate and yet mysteriously at one with each other"<sup>65</sup> suggest the encircling embrace which signifies the binding possession he is forbidden. Though he comes close here to telling part of the horse's story, that moment defeats him and he exits 'abruptly'. Later he will tell Sophia he can't trust his hands, and Lydia, with those passionate hands nearly gripping her, should be left, I feel, with something of the terrified expression of the horse while Dimetos describes the moment "when you were prostrate on his back, your cheek resting on his powerful neck, your hands working away quietly underneath him as you placed the slings..."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 31

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 28

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 28



Hands are an important part of the imagery. Lydia's hands, tying the knots, prompt this confession of love by Dimetos, and hands, during the meal, are used by Dimetos to exemplify work and responsibility in the theme of *homo faber*. Dimetos talks about the difference between the hands belonging to a potter named Jerome, which use the clay in the process of making to combine the virtues of liquid and solid, and a smith, significantly called Daniel, who forges metal, making links in a great chain. When he compares the chains with those used to fetter Prometheus we are reminded of the complex of ideas associated with Blake's 'mind-forged manacles' and the theme of Prometheus as the human imagination giving humanity power over its environment only to have it use that power to put the imagination in chains. Dimetos rejects the beggar's hands which take without giving, an attitude which once prompted the admiration of the young Danilo, who saw the reciprocity of men's work as an ideal, though Dimetos now prefers a Thatcherite revision of their motives as profit. However, Dimetos' favourite hands are those of the juggler, the Mercurial trickster who in the service of entertainment has mastered the apparently useless paradox: "Learn to give and take with the same action."<sup>67</sup> Hands continue to be an important theme throughout the rest of the play.

When the crisis comes five days later Danilo gives himself the task of restoring Lydia's faith in the future. During the meal he had defined belief in progress as 'wanting tomorrow', but now Lydia has lost that faith: "I'd give up any chance of ever going back to the city if the three of us could go back to what it was like... five days ago."<sup>68</sup> Koslowski regards the end of the meta-narrative of progress as defining the postmodern condition:

Die Moderne als Ideologie und der Modernismus erzählen einen großen Mythos, den Totalmythos des Fortschritts und seiner Erfüllung in der Gesellschaft der Moderne, die die Geschichte zu ihrem Ende bringe. Der forcierte Begriff der Geschichte als innerweltliche Heilsgeschichte und die Ideologie der Moderne, daß die Geschichte selbst das Sich-Ablösen historischer Epochen und Entwürfe aufheben und beenden könne, beinhaltet in seiner realen Wirkung das Ende der Geschichtlichkeit und Historie überhaupt.

(The modern as an ideology and modernism itself recount a great myth, the totalizing myth of progress and its fulfilment in modern society, which will bring history to an end. The forced concept of history as a soteriology within the world and the ideology of modernity that history can repeal and end the succession of historical epochs and projects has the actual effect of ending historicity and even history itself.)<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 34

<sup>69</sup> Koslowski, *Die Prüfungen der Neuzeit*, p. 13 (my translation)



Instead the realization returns that time still passes, perhaps with regret. Danilo would like to restore Lydia's belief in progress through love. He kisses her and holds her, but is unable to control himself and his hands; she resists him and his force, and her dress gets torn in what has turned into an attempted rape.

After the confrontation with Danilo, first Sophia then Dimetos come to Lydia. Speaking wildly, Sophia alternates useless appeals to their alchemical game with the obsessive question 'Who was it?', fearing that it will have been Dimetos. Her jealousy drives her to



13. Lydia and Dimetos (Bernd Hardeweg)

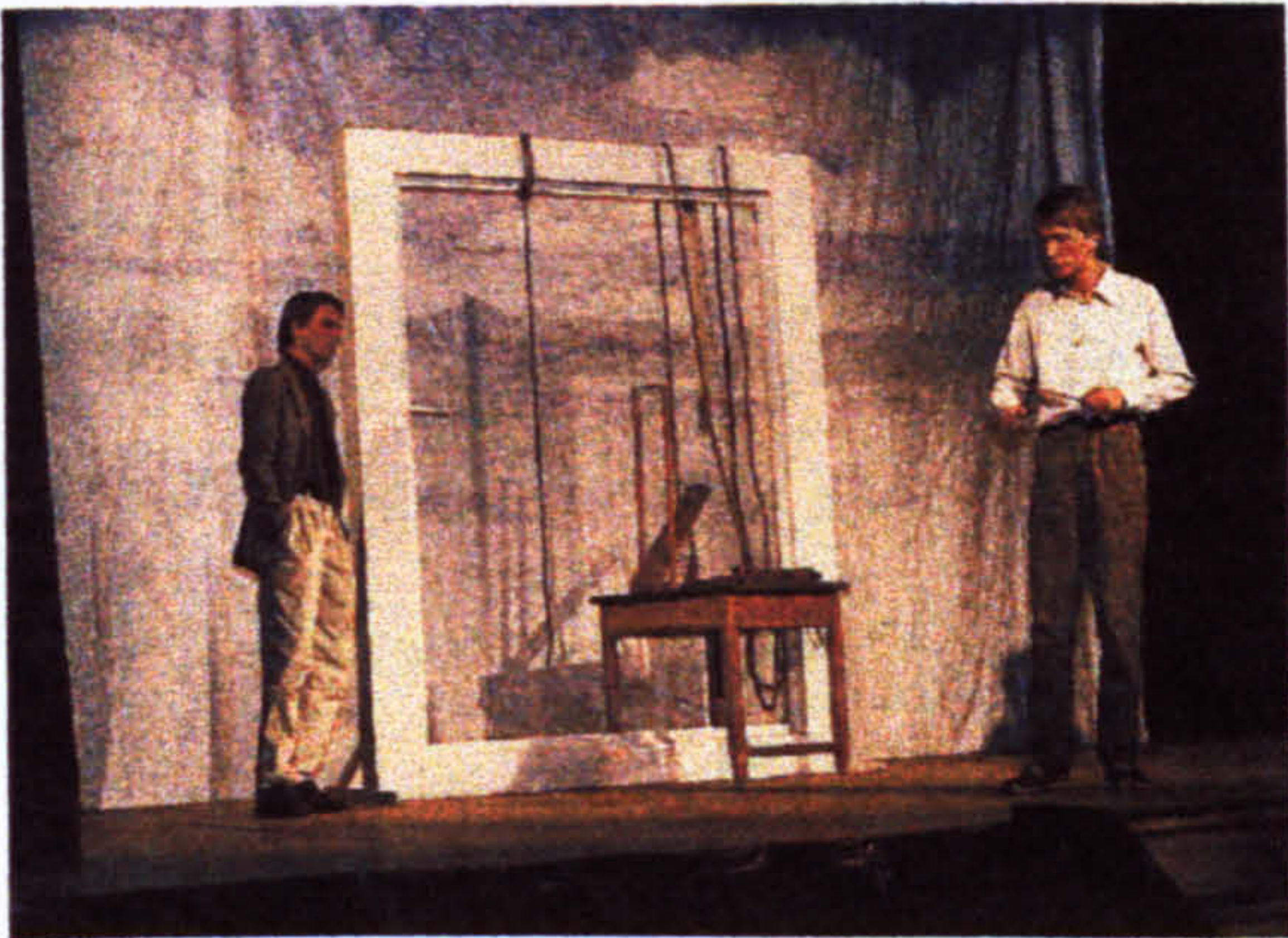
humiliate herself before Lydia on her knees, and then to assault her in turn, because to be the subject of passion is to fall into bondage and slavery: "To love is a position of weakness, to be loved a position of power."<sup>70</sup> Then she leaves Lydia.

Alone and frightened, trembling as if she has been whipped, Lydia stands. Dimetos enters breathlessly. The stage direction says: "He is frightened of his hands". From the smell of lemon leaves on them Lydia realizes he has been watching her. She knows that Danilo's attempt to grasp her against her will was vicariously Dimetos' own. He confirms it as he describes watching their kiss as an extension of his own daydream image of himself with Lydia earlier by the pool. His idea of time being held, however, by which he wishes to

<sup>70</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 36



redeem their relationship by saving more horses, is the scientific definition of the word 'solstice': "The day the sun stood still".<sup>71</sup> It is illusory, though, because "the year has turned on its side",<sup>72</sup> a phrase that recalls Michael Tippett's oratorio *A Child of Our Time*, a Jungian investigation of the horrors of racist persecution in terms of illusion and projection: "The world has turned on its dark side. It is winter. Man has measured the heavens with a telescope, driven the gods from their thrones. But the soul, watching the chaotic mirror, knows that the gods return. Truly, the living god consumes within and turns the flesh to cancer!"<sup>73</sup> Lydia, too, knows too much. Her icy dismissal of Dimetos allows no appeal.



14. Danilo (Oliver Schwarz) and Dimetos favoured a minimalist stage in his own productions.<sup>74</sup> Dennis Walder describes the difficulties of managing the opening scene in the well effectively, and points out that an ingenious Cape Town production used a gauze tube: "But it is hard not to be distracted by the sheer mechanics of the scene, to miss what it is all supposed to represent..."<sup>75</sup> For any director or designer, staging appropriate for the continuous action of the play is critical.

Lydia's extraordinary suicide requires care in staging. Fugard himself exhibits Shakespearean restraint in his use of stage directions or requirements for scenery and props, and



15. Magritte, 'La Clef des Champs', 1933

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 36

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 37

<sup>73</sup> Tippett, *A Child of Our Time*, London: Schott, 1944

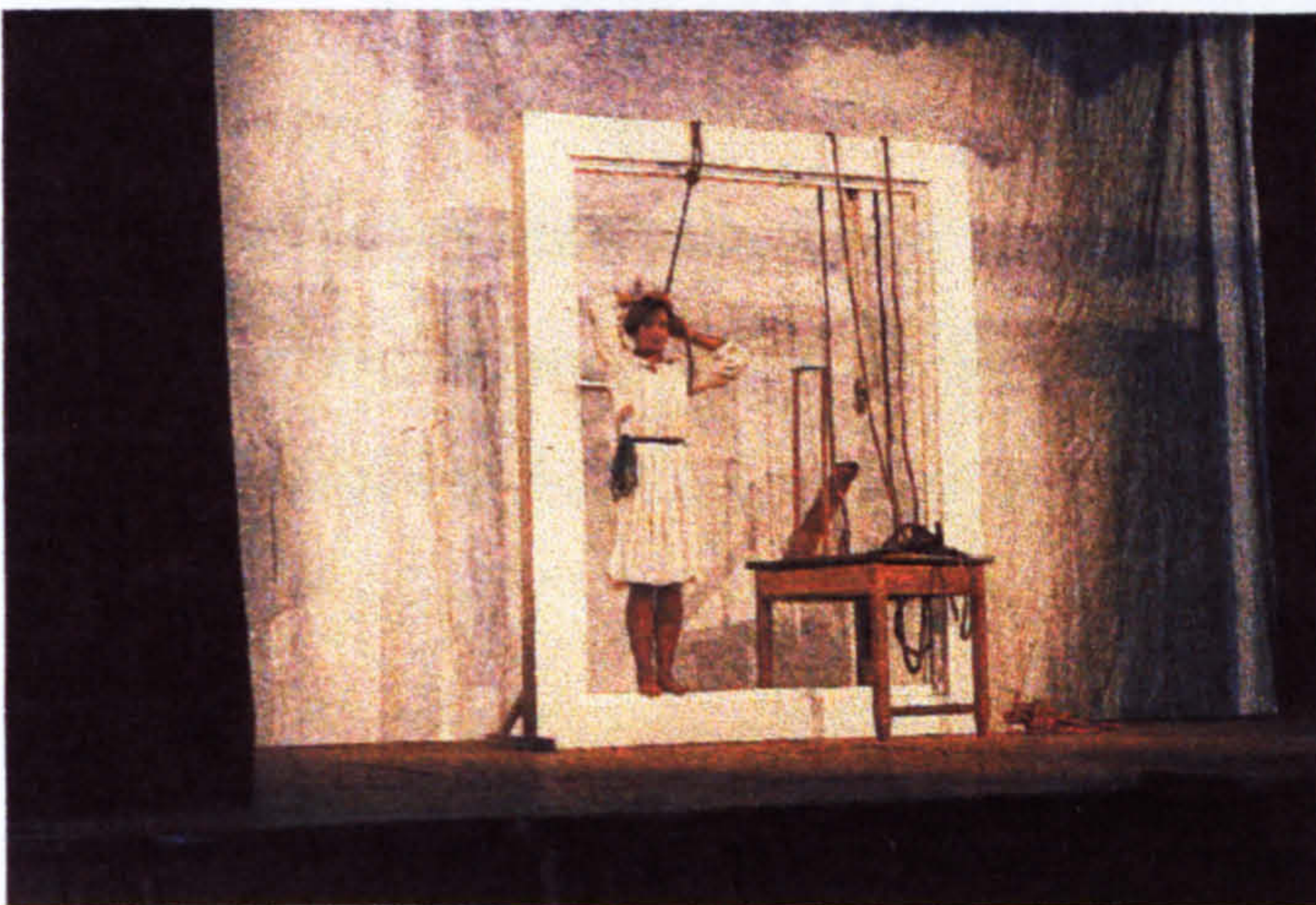
<sup>74</sup> See the reviews of the Edinburgh and London productions, and Fugard's own comment that his production was "too sparse, too bare" in the interview given to Mary Benson, 'Keeping an Appointment with the Future' (*Theatre Quarterly*, 7, 28, 1977), p. 83.

<sup>75</sup> Walder, *Athol Fugard*, p. 102



Our solution, after experimenting with various unconvincing ideas of representing country cottages, was to suggest an interior by the giant rectangle of a window, with a huge backdrop of a sky behind it. In front of this window was a table cluttered with old tools and the illustrations of the 'six mechanical powers', while several ropes and a pulley hung from the top of the window. The window alluded to the paintings of Magritte, particularly to *La Clef des Champs* (fig. 15) in which the glass of the window is shattered, but the landscape is both on the fragments of glass and visible outside through the holes. It is an image of the ambiguous illusion of single vision in which human beings can be held by something which does not exist and can overcome it by a fiction. This window was used in both acts, with only a harrow and a fishing net to suggest the different settings. It was only during the course of rehearsals that I noticed the pattern of entrances and exits allowed only Sophia to step through the window in Act I, while all the others treated it as a solid wall. Lydia, when she commits suicide, stands on the window-sill, and in hanging herself from the top beam passes through the window as the scene is plunged into darkness.

For this suicide is not a suicide of despair; Lydia is not guilty of anything. She has been



16. Lydia

let down, but she does not blame anyone for it. She feels like the horse, at the bottom of a well:

I know your story now. You didn't know that men make holes in the world. You thought it was safe. So you trusted it. [...] But one day without any warning... down, down, down to the bottom where it was cold and dark and you were alone and you were frightened.<sup>76</sup>

But she hangs herself with a mysterious confidence, using the knot Dimetos has taught her,<sup>77</sup> and with the words: "For all its holes the world is still worth it — because Dimetos makes happy endings."<sup>78</sup> She accepts that rope and her physical death as the only way to release the imagination from its fallen state, which is a task to be performed by Dimetos.

<sup>76</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 37

<sup>77</sup> This knot, incidentally, the fisherman's bend, could not strangle her because, as in the slings for the horse, the knot bites into itself and won't slip. Here, for the first time, the play indicates a move beyond reality.

<sup>78</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 37



The setting of Act II — "Beside the Ocean" — is on a beach which should by now be familiar to the reader as the 'seigniory of Faust', the border between the conscious and the unconscious.<sup>79</sup> Blake's distinction between eternity and the infinity of more-of-the-same is unclear to Dimetos. Time is irrelevant, like sand filling any number of the 'lunatic hour-glasses' of his hands, just as the lack of landmarks makes the infinity of space meaningless. The existentialist predicament of the individual is aptly symbolized in the emptiness of elemental space in which only the suggestion of purpose mapped by the progress of footprints to the present questions the supremacy of the void. The sea with its tidal power offers no meaning, is simply "colossal and totally absurd energy" used only to "polish stones until they disappear".<sup>80</sup>

The sea of the unconscious has, however, washed up something: a dead sea-mammal; an amphibian between the unconscious and the conscious, which gradually through the next scenes makes itself felt between Dimetos and Sophia as an evil odour poisoning the atmosphere. Like the body in Ionesco's *Amédée* it comes to dominate their lives, forcing them to close their doors and windows and retreat into an ever more claustrophobic sense of confinement.<sup>81</sup> In 'blocking' this act for performance it became clear that Sophia was no longer able to pass through the window, but like a caged animal paced an ever decreasing area defined by invisible walls. As her space becomes smaller her aggressiveness grows, providing a new dramatic 'spring' for the action now that, 'unconventionally, both the dramatic conflicts of Act I (the return to the city and the relationship with Lydia) have been removed.

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<sup>79</sup> "How thin and insecure is that little beach of white sand we call the conscious. I've always known that in my writing it is the dark troubled sea of which I know nothing, save its presence, that carried me." Fugard, *Notebooks*, p. 73

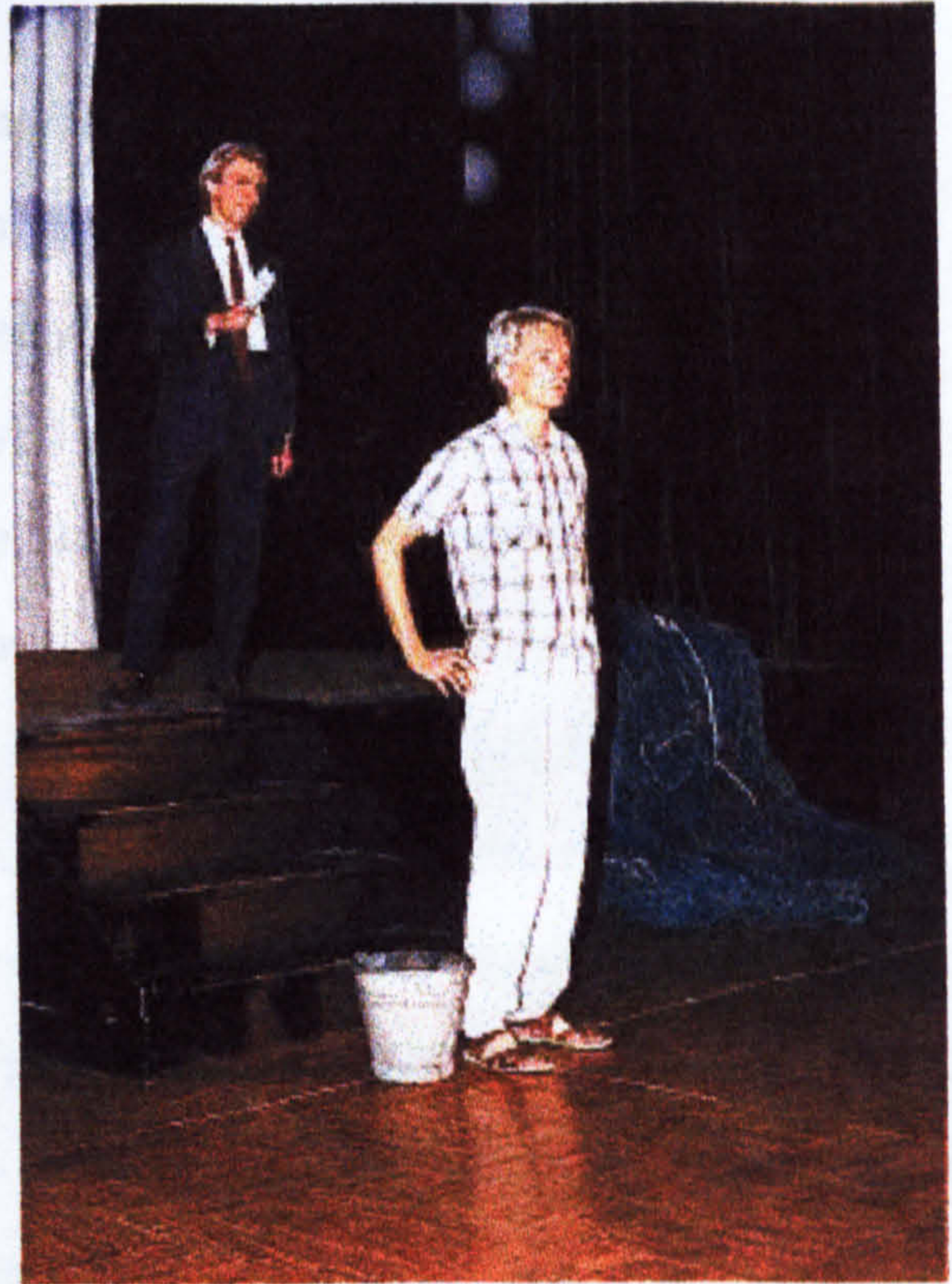
<sup>80</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 40

<sup>81</sup> In describing the dead shark on the rocks in the 1973 *Notebooks* entry, Fugard noted its vicious teeth, and went on: "The appalling intolerance and savagery of man when he encounters anything that does not fit into 'his' scheme of things. The vanity and vicious pride that is blind to the possibility of a pattern larger than 'his' needs and convenience. Out of the shark's terrible maws the voices of Jews in gas-ovens, the condemned in death cells, the thin spiral of 'time' on Robben Island." (Fugard, *Notebooks*, p. 209) 'Robben' of course mean 'seals'.



Danilo, on his return, directly addresses the audience, as he did in Act I when talking about the wall. He is the only character to do so, and he expresses the audience's need for a realistic basis of the action, for a story anchored in time with cause and effect.

During the course of his conversation with Dimetos the outline of Dimetos' current existence, and the facts of what happened before and after Lydia's suicide, are revealed in a way that should make sense, tracing origins and motivations, the mechanisms of causality, and the just



17. Danilo and Dimetos

apportioning of guilt. Yet Danilo, of course, only represents 'single vision'. He fails to see anything that is really happening in the play:

To all intents and purposes he had come to terms with himself in that no-man's land between the tides, collecting his sea shells. If there was something more at work I saw no evidence of it.<sup>82</sup>

He sees only a "temptation to act out a fanciful metaphor for the last adventure of all".<sup>83</sup>

Danilo realizes that, in a world of single vision, causes must be bound to effects, that Dimetos should be affected by his actions, but finds him instead "tanned and healthy". He also knows that faced with the crises of passion: "This rational intelligence of ours, our special human capacity for anticipating, predicting pain... our own or another's... as the consequence of an action, was useless, wasn't it?" For life to make sense under single vision, *all* actions, including human actions, would need to have consequences as a "fundamental law of the universe, and of a magnitude on a par with your gravity",<sup>84</sup> in other words an Old Testament sense of retribution, Danilo says 'punishment'. As he points out, morality, notions of good and evil, mean nothing without that sense of consequence, and turn into an existentialist illusion or game. For Danilo, filled with a sense of self-disgust and

<sup>82</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 41

<sup>83</sup> There is a possible allusion here to the suicide by drowning of the poet Ingrid Jonker (1933-65), a contemporary of Athol Fugard's.



guilt which has destroyed his vision or belief in the city, that is true. Yet he is not identical with Dimetos, and the distinction, which commentators have tended to miss, is critical.

Even on the outward level of relationships between characters Danilo's view is severely limited. In another revelatory scene of discovery one learns, or rather is reminded of something half-perceived which one is annoyed with oneself for not having borne in mind clearly enough, the role that Sophia has played in the tragedy. Dimetos' already battered sense of his ego's importance is further undermined when Sophia points out that his desire to foreground his guilt after stressing his own passion and his own life is an expression of extreme selfishness. She recounts her own role in Lydia's suicide, referring in passing to those idyllic moments of their personal alchemy which now really resemble a lost paradise.

On the inner level Sophia has now turned from being Dimetos' free and reliable intellect to being his obsessive 'fate': "Not mother, sister, companion or friend... but your fate."<sup>85</sup> With the growing stench of decay she becomes a smothering and evil psychological presence before whom Dimetos shrinks to a little boy fiddling with his hands. "I had to smack yours once or twice for that, remember? Is that when you fell in love with your hands?"<sup>86</sup> Now the 'great engineer' Dimetos is incapable of the relatively simple operation of recovering the dead carcase from the rock, is reduced to fumbling the stones he has found in a masturbatory game which he claims to be playing, of throwing his name to the sea and making it up again out of stones.<sup>87</sup> In frustration Sophia slams the stones down in rhythm to the letters of his name, eliciting the involuntary "NO" from Dimetos which reveals that it is not his name but Lydia's which he is trying to rescue from the unconscious in a palpable form. It is to avoid

<sup>84</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 44

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47

<sup>87</sup> The stones on the beach are the product of erosion by the forces of the sea. They are the material worked upon by the unconscious. Fugard wrote: "Stones and secrets. Because you can pick them up, hold them, you think they are accessible, are 'public'... they are the most secretive of things... their submissiveness is the most singular act of defiance in all of Creation." (Fugard, *Notebooks*, p. 217). Whitaker draws attention to a passage in Lévi-Strauss from Ch 32 of *Tristes Tropiques* in which he describes the attraction of the tidal zones of the sea-shore "because of their challenge to our enterprises, the unexpected universe they conceal, and their promise of observations and discoveries stimulating to the imagination" and compares the operations which produce masterpieces of human art with the sea's art producing "pebbles with holes, shells whose geometry has been reshaped by the wear and tear of the ocean". Whitaker, 'Dimoetes to Dimetos', p. 59 (note)



seeing that ghost: "She's still hanging there. I can't get her down,"<sup>88</sup> that, as he finally admits, he is afraid to look up.<sup>89</sup>



18. Peter Birkhäuser, 'Der Einwärtsblickende' (1954)

At the point of his admission he is freed from Sophia's rage, as she tells the story of finding Lydia's hanging corpse, smeared with excrement.<sup>90</sup> The walk Sophia depicts to find Lydia is a walk into the underworld; she shifts into the Present to describe the figure she sees, 'warm and beautiful', but "one eye, her head is turned in profile... is fixed on something evil, ugly... like a hawk's eye."<sup>91</sup> — and here the actress portraying this will almost inevitably shoot a glance at the audience, so that the

merging of their identities as one acts the part of the other makes it clear that both Sophia and Lydia form integral parts of the same Anima archetype — the 'feminine' — in its malevolent and benevolent aspects, just as Dimetos and Danilo are related in masculine 'single vision'.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 49

<sup>89</sup> Dimetos has already tried to calculate the power of the tide to get down that hanging body. He knows the unconscious must be used to do it, but he does not know how.

<sup>90</sup> Roszak, as mentioned earlier, points to one of the paradoxical effects of the idolization of reified projections in the material: a horror of the organic: "What is it our horror literature and science fiction haul in whenever they seek to make our skin crawl? Anything alive, mindless, and gooey... [...] In a word, anything *organic*, and as messy as birth, sex, death, and decay." (Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, p. 88 — author's italics) Roszak is making the point that: "Single vision cannot understand such a state of being, let alone trust it to look after itself. Rather, it seeks to *imperialize* the body, in much the same way that, in the world at large, civilized cultures seek to imperialize primitive cultures." (Ibid., pp. 87f. — author's italics) One is reminded of the concerns of Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*. Roszak's dichotomy between 'head' and 'body', or 'rational' and 'organic', going back to Descartes, can also be seen as 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

<sup>91</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 49. One is reminded here of the Anima figure in Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well* (see Ch 6).

<sup>92</sup> There is a striking similarity between this vision and the painting by the Swiss artist Peter Birkhäuser *Der Einwärtsblickende* (1954), reproduced here as fig. 18; the artist was at the time resisting pressure from the unconscious to abandon 'single vision'.



The dream image from the underworld of the unconscious which Sophia describes, of a woman who keeps company with "a donkey, an owl, a griffin, a bat and an old, million-year-old turtle"<sup>93</sup> alludes to Blake's colour print *Hecate* (fig. 19), produced in the same year



19. Blake, 'Hecate'

as his 'Newton'.<sup>94</sup> The triple figure of the feminine, beautiful and dangerous, is related by Klonsky to Blake's conception of the Female Will, discussed previously in Chapter 5, and to the three witches in *Macbeth*.<sup>95</sup> Sophia says: "There is a terrible familiarity between herself and the entrance to hell, which is just behind her. She goes in and out. She was waiting for me."<sup>96</sup> Lydia, in death, becomes the key to the Mephistophelian world of hell, not seen as a

<sup>93</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 50

<sup>94</sup> The confirmation that this scene alludes to the Blake print is given by Vandenbroucke: "During rehearsals of *Dimetos* in London, Fugard took Yvonne Bryceland to the Tate Gallery to view Blake's color print *Hecate*: 'I wanted to deal with a moment in the play and I said to Y, "Just look at this very carefully. Give yourself ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, as long as you need, then come back and describe it." What exists in *Dimetos*, with one or two refinements, is her verbatim recall of that terrible image of somebody at hell's gate.'" Vandenbroucke, *Truths the Hand Can Touch*, p. 212. It has been suggested that this incident actually took place in Scotland before the Edinburgh production.

<sup>95</sup> Klonsky, *William Blake, The Seer and his Visions*, p. 60. The three witches obviously have literary antecedents and psychological relatives in the Three Fates or the Three Norns (interestingly related to the questions of freedom of will, control over the world, and of time), and find a parallel in the three women whose presence at the 'hell-mouth' of the Company offices in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* makes such an impression on the narrator. (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 24ff.)

<sup>96</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 50



separate place or an ultimate time but as a condition from which she might still provide redemption. She is related, therefore, to the vision of his lost soul that Faustus sees in Helen.

But for the engineer Dimetos, still blinkered by single vision, neither Sophia's helpless confession of love, nor his own rehearsal of the physical laws of the universe that had enabled the Magus-engineer to perform all the feats of supposed magic in the repertory of technological civilization including flights to the moon can bring down that hanging body, because of Versfeld's two objections to the Faustian project: *on kai me on* — things as they are — which means a dead Lydia cannot be a living Lydia, and time, the cause of her life being irrecoverably in the past, and the actions that led to her death being in a relation of irreversible causality behind that event.<sup>97</sup> While that is true, Fugard realizes, Dimetos, like Faustus, is condemned to hell. With increasing panic Dimetos tries each of Newton's laws in turn, aware, as Faustus is, of the inexorable passing of time. In our production we borrowed a device Fugard uses in another play, the ticking clock,<sup>98</sup> becoming gradually more insistent in an uncanny echo of the water-drops that had suggested the well at the beginning of the play. Only now it is Dimetos who is at the bottom of the well, and it is only when Dimetos is prepared to admit the failure and uselessness of the Mephistophelian project based on single vision ("Time stinks! [*He is totally defeated*] What must I do?")<sup>99</sup> that Lydia's voice is heard in the sudden silence giving him calm instructions by which his horse of the imagination can be raised from its deadly predicament.

Instead of his hands, which are 'useless', Lydia tells Dimetos that only a story can hold time. Paradoxically, she describes it in terms of one of his mechanical tools, a 'lever' with a fulcrum and the 'clean edges' of a beginning and end. It seems, in fact, to be a conventional time frame until one considers that its beginning 'once upon a time' is itself timeless. Its form in Indian languages ('there was there was not') or in Slav languages (e.g. *bylo nebylo*

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<sup>97</sup> A 1967 entry in the *Notebooks* is relevant here: "Regret and nostalgia make the past, desire the future; the present? The limbo of becoming — the fulcrum between one mistake and another — the perpetual seesaw we think is living." This is the result of a particular idea of time: "Our terrible segmentation — days, hours, minutes, last year, next year, past and future — when all we really need is one word: present, or, better still, a new word, or no word at all because the reality is all of it, past present and future." Fugard, *Notebooks*, p. 157

<sup>98</sup> An alarm clock plays an important part in *The Blood Knot*.

<sup>99</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 51



in Czech) marks it as the trace in existing time of a non-existent essence outside the dimension of time.<sup>100</sup> Similarly the end, 'for ever after' is neither end nor endlessness. Between them 'there was' in fiction that is true is the place where the imagination can cross the barrier of *on kai me on*.

The idea of fiction written against time is not new. J. B. Priestley concluded his study *Man and Time* (1964) with the words:

I have written this book in the belief that the choice of the right turning, a decision that may be final if not for our whole species then at least for our civilization, cannot be separated from the relations between Man and Time.<sup>101</sup>

He associates the 'right turning' with Jung's concept of individuation, or the relations between ego consciousness and the Self with its personal and collective unconscious dimension. His investigation of the fictional treatment of time<sup>102</sup> runs along similar lines to those of a recent study by Herbert Grabes, 'Writing Against Time'<sup>103</sup> which deals with the proposition that the entire literary aesthetic of the twentieth century has been largely determined by the endeavour to write against time. Following the Kantian tripartite description of time as duration, succession and coexistence, Grabes shows how the modes of linear succession dominant in 19th century fiction<sup>104</sup> are replaced in the modern period with increasingly subversive strategies. In the first phase relations between the successive and the coexistent are sought, as in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*<sup>105</sup> or in Pound's definition of the image as 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'.<sup>106</sup> The second phase represented by Joyce's *Ulysses*, Woolfe's *To the Lighthouse*, Proust's *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu* and Eliot's *The Waste Land* features narrative and stylistic techniques designed to exaggerate or break up succession in order to suggest underlying permanence or archetypal repetition. The third phase is typified by *Finnegans Wake*, in which, as Grabes says, "If multiple meanings can refer to the same signifier,

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<sup>100</sup> One could compare the traditional ending of Caribbean Anancy stories: 'Jack Mandora, me no choose none!' According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* this also means 'I have said and not said!'

<sup>101</sup> Priestley, *Man and Time*, p. 317

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-99

<sup>103</sup> Grabes, 'Writing Against Time', *Poetica* 28, 1996, pp. 368-85

<sup>104</sup> Priestley draws attention in this context to the techniques of accelerated and slow motion narration prevalent in the 19th century and their effects.

<sup>105</sup> One is tempted to relate this in turn to Wilde's Faustian novel *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted by Fugard in *Notebooks*, p. 77



multiple phenomena dispersed over time and space can relate to the same archetype."<sup>107</sup>

Eliot's *Four Quartets*, later Brecht and Beckett are given as further examples here. These techniques of writing against time contributed to the undermining of the meta-narrative of progress, beginning the period of postmodernism. In postmodernism Grabes observes both an extension of the techniques available in modernism (e.g. in Brautigan and Pynchon) or the return of apparently successive narrative with a 'magical' dimension (e.g. in Marquez or Fuentes). The difference between modernist and postmodern writing is perhaps, and this Grabes fails to mention, the death of a further master-concept, a stable conception of the physical laws of reality, which undermines the hegemony of mimesis.

It is therefore appropriate that Lydia's tool of the story, the gift of the Anima to imagination, is in Fugard's play something to overcome the iron laws of being and non-being within time — implied in the Mephistophelian offer of control over projections treated as reality — substituting instead the creation (*poesis*) of a world subject to the patterns of archetypal visionary imagination itself, which are metonymic and ambivalent in nature. At the same time it returns story to the function it still has among marginalized peoples, such as those of Australia or the Americas, of creating and maintaining the world. In this sense Fugard's *Dimetos*, in its final scene, is pointing in a direction which is truly postcolonial and cross-cultural.

*Dimetos*' final actions are to learn to use this tool, which he does with increasing confidence. He uses a series of images to extract himself from that 'hole in the world' in order to construct the 'happy ending' that Lydia confidently required when she ended her life as an individual in successive time / space. Because this language is metonymic it no longer has single referents for each signifier, but they are multivalent and multi-levelled, connected by meaningful resonance as much as cause, both existent and non-existent. Thus the story begins with a man who dreams he is a horse. The horse has fallen and is helpless. He projects the state of his own imagination on to the real but fictional horse. His is the fallen state of humanity in the material world according to Gnostic cosmology. Then the horse is saved by the girl; her presence inspires him; she is the rider of his imagination. Through her he is rescued, but the memory of her, the Gnostic spark, makes him desire to possess her

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<sup>107</sup> Grabes, 'Writing Against Time', p. 378



and for that his hooves are transformed into hands. Now, though, he can no longer move through fear of falling. Now he is metamorphosed into a human, using his consciousness to master the 'four elements of the universe' for her, his soul, only to find he has lost her. So now, in his renewed despair, her voice returns to his final embodiment in the dream, his hands alone, which must overcome their natural desire to possess, their need for the certainty of being over non-being. In learning finally to juggle, to "give and take with the same action",<sup>108</sup> he learns the truth of visionary fiction, by which gravity can be overcome, and his laughter rises in free gaiety, a moment we accompanied in our production with a rising musical improvisation in the Lydian mode. The culmination, the final skill of all, is to hold his hands out and wait. The final image,<sup>109</sup> reminiscent of the saviour (the Anthropos) who died and did not die, remains an enigma which cannot be communicated.



20. Dimetos

<sup>108</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 52

<sup>109</sup> Roszak describes the overcoming of 'single vision': "But this is to speak of a kind of knowledge our science knows nothing of, a knowledge that produces no 'data points.' Reach here for hard fact, and you come away... empty-handed. Like the hands of St. Francis, held open to the birds... empty, yet full." Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, p. 233



## Chapter Eight

### The Crystal Cliff: David Dabydeen's *Disappearance*

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The play *Dimetos* ends with the engineer standing in the impossible territory 'between the salt water and the sea-strand' in an attitude of consenting, self-confessional recognition that the only resources that can redeem him from his guilt, despair and dismemberment, resulting from 'single vision', are those inherent in the unconscious mediated through the magic of creative imagination. My thesis has indicated that the engineer, who manipulates his projection of the natural world, which he takes to be the only reality, to gain power by extending his body and nervous system in an illusory conquest of space and time, is the direct heir of the Gnostic / Hermetic Magus who, in the guise of Faust, was seduced into bargaining his soul away for the Mephistophelian lure in the political and material world; that soul, however, the Helen of Faustus and of Simon Magus, and the Lydia of *Dimetos*, is the perilous agent of his redemption, his Ariel.

The unnamed protagonist and narrator of David Dabydeen's second novel *Disappearance* is also an engineer who finds himself on the debatable margin of a coastline threatened with erosion when he takes on the responsibility for trying to shore up and stabilize the precarious English cliffs near Hastings.<sup>1</sup> As an engineer he is also engaged in the attempt to control forces that, in time, threaten to overwhelm him:

Each night, in the first weeks of coming to England, I had stood on the cliff's edge listening to the sea, the wind swiping at my face so that I could barely open my eyes. I would look up to a sky ragged with stars, feeling that I could, given time, calculate all the forces meeting against me. I was the measure of all their colossal energy. There was an intense pleasure in sensing my eventual power to address and harvest those forces, one-tongued creation that I was.<sup>2</sup>

Dabydeen's narrator has come to England from an independent Guyana, part of the reverse movement from the colonized margin to the metropolitan centre, not as a slave or unskilled immigrant but as a qualified expert in a position of authority. Sent by his revered

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<sup>1</sup> It will be recalled that Blake's meditation on single and fourfold vision was written by the sea in Sussex, though some miles to the west. Newton also compared himself to a boy playing by the sea-shore. See Ch 5.

<sup>2</sup> David Dabydeen, *Disappearance*, p. 15



mentor, an English professor who trained him at the Guyana Technical College, the Afro-Guyanese narrator feels that as "a West-Indian, someone born in a new age for a new world,"<sup>3</sup> he need not concern himself with history or origins: "I spent my time in Guyana preparing for the future, which to me could only be in the sciences."<sup>4</sup> He regards the creation of a technological infrastructure for the 'progress' of a 'developing' country and the engineering of adequate sea defences to protect the low-lying polders of the fertile coastal strip as the highest priorities. He thus epitomizes the emulation by former colonies of the technocratic aims of the imperializing powers.

He stays with his elderly English landlady, Mrs Rutherford, in the clifftop village of Dunsmere, where the efforts by local residents including the mysterious Mr Curtis have resulted in the £19m project to erect sea-defences being set in train. Here the progress of the construction work, never described in detail, and the ambiguous relationship with Mrs Rutherford form a counterpoint to a series of flashbacks from the narrator's youth in Guyana and his largely unsuccessful attempts to achieve an orderly penetration of the secrets of Dunsmere and its residents. Though by the end of the novel the wall has been completed, its value is questioned and its permanence remains doubtful,<sup>5</sup> and of other expectations of the novel — revelations of character, progress in plot from turning-point to climax to dénouement — few if any are fulfilled.

Clearly this destabilization, in a novel whose deceptively crystalline syntax and cool beauty of utterance assert a belief in written forms, reveals metonymic intentions about fiction and its role in postcolonial societies (by which I mean not just former colonies but also their former colonizers) and a desire to relate these developments to a wider discussion about the creative imagination which is intimately bound up with with the discussions we have followed from their beginnings in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition rediscovered by Ficino and Reuchlin as far as Dimetos on the beach relearning the imaginative arts. Because

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 17

<sup>5</sup> The narrator is urged to "Rejoice!" for having carved his name on English history, but he is filled only with resentment. The quote refers back to the novel's final epigraph, providing a political and historical context for the narration. Mrs Thatcher's reaction to the news that the Argentine forces in the Falkland Islands had surrendered and that this small piece of the former Empire had been shored up against assault serves to define a particular self-image of Britain in the 1980s. As part of a discourse of invasion and settlement it is, of course, one of a number of self-images which the novel refracts and undermines as part of its project of ambivalence.



this discussion appears modish — the questioning of master-narratives in postmodernism appearing to open a groundless theme-park of intertextual ironic play, and the decentring of hegemonic concerns giving rise to a whole new estate of critical industry — *Disappearance* has been criticized as a mere attempt to put academic theory into practice. If, as Mark McWatt cautions, "there is no 'truth' in the novel (except the endless restatement of the political correctness of postcolonial theory) then the reader is at least as diminished as the fiction."<sup>6</sup>

Yet the narrator, in admitting that he is 'one-tongued', and in seeking to use division and measurement, his 'scientific instruments', against the unpredictable and turbulent forces of the unconscious, is aligning the 'single vision' Fugard has demolished with a broader mimetic tradition in literature. It is a strategy that will inevitably have repercussions in terms of theory, philosophy and the creative process in general. Dabydeen's project in *Disappearance* seems to be to weave these disparate strands together in a way which transcends the 'scientific' separation of genres. So although the narrator appears to want to tell a simple story ostensibly about an enlightened world in which history has been erased: "What happened long ago was not of my making and didn't make me," his apparent naïvety about origins becomes one of a number of ironic gateways used by the author to investigate the themes of history and tradition, and the role of the imagination in mediating an increasingly elusive reality. McWatt also recognizes this constructive aspect: "Manipulated by the postcolonial awareness of the author, the narrator is made to stand counter to text, insinuating into its narrative fastnesses the chaos of possibility, of counter-discourse."<sup>7</sup>

In Mrs Rutherford's house the narrator is confronted with two types of tradition: the African pots and masks her husband collected, and the house itself with its English ornaments, ancestral photographs, and the books lining its shelves. Both of these separate traditions are then destabilized. The pots, though one should be able to identify them according to traditional tribal characteristics, have in fact been collected from unexpected parts of Africa, bearing witness to undocumented influences and migrations, and the masks

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<sup>6</sup> McWatt, 'Self-Consciously Post-Colonial: the Fiction of David Dabydeen' in Grant (Ed), *The Art of David Dabydeen*, p. 122. One hesitates to dissent from a perceptive critic and fellow-poet who shares something of Dabydeen's Guyanese background, but I feel he is mistaken if he regards Dabydeen's art as secondary to his academic pursuits.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 118



which originated in brutal initiation rites among a gentle people give the narrator, an African West-Indian, no more sense of identification with their culture than did the statue of Cuffy, the hero of a slave rebellion, erected by the newly independent Guyanese government, which "served to arouse discomfort in adults and terror in children,"<sup>8</sup> like the footprint on Crusoe's island.<sup>9</sup> The narrator recoils at the idea that he as an engineer might be associated with what he believes Mrs Rutherford sees in him: "a Negro, his large black hands carefully holding up a sacred bowl almost in an attitude of worship, as a servant to some tribal goddess would have done dark centuries ago."<sup>10</sup> However, even Mrs Rutherford immediately establishes the connection between the engineer and the magic inherent in the masks: "The Africans use them to control nature as you use tractors and bulldozers."<sup>11</sup> The reference to the goddess is also relevant to the fiction, as we shall see.

The books in the house, on the other hand, attract the narrator more. With their air of having a venerable history with linear time enclosing lives "whose futures were bound to the past like pages in a book following each other in sequence and ending in the hard board of a coffin,"<sup>12</sup> inspiring the respect of Caliban for Prospero, they in fact reveal something totally different. They are not merely texts in the traditional sense, not the stories or 'facts' they contain alone (which we never hear), but involve, besides the physical appearance of the book medium, their textures and smells, the names of their sometime owners or dedicators or dedicatees: "*Ex libris Joseph Countryman Esq. Dominus Illuminatio Mea,*" or Albert, John and Annie:

*For Albert, on being sixteen. May God keep you steadfast in your studies and prosper in His Grace and Wisdom. Your Loving Father; Dearest Annie, each word in this book tells your life and mine. Love John.* How was the father to know that Albert would indeed go on to become Professor of Classics at Oxford, Jack the Ripper's pimp or a leader of the Cato Street Conspiracy? And Annie, Dearest Annie, with apple-juice breasts that men gurgled and choked on, marble thighs that made men slip and break their necks; Annie who may have married John, lived in a farmhouse and produced six healthy children (brown and speckled like farmhouse eggs) who worked on the land and cared for their parents in their old age; Annie who, burdened with John's molestations and fetishes, perhaps absconded with an early feminist and wrote treatises against Royalty, Episcopacy, the Judiciary and other phallogocentric institutions.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Dabydeen, *Disappearance*, p. 16

<sup>9</sup> Cuffy (Kofi) is a West African name meaning 'Friday'. A piece of pure synchronicity.

<sup>10</sup> Dabydeen, *Disappearance*, p. 7

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 12

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 9



If the stories of these people disappear in contradiction and ambiguity, the narrator is right to suggest that there is another way to read them: "Books with raised holes made by insects in their pages, resembling Braille, as if even the blind could have access to the knowledge contained therein."<sup>14</sup> Without history, without the social, political and cultural nexus binding him within a scheme of time, he "could even, with culturally blind eyes, look through the tunnels made by the termites which bored through the whole text, and beyond, ..." <sup>15</sup>

The distinction between a linear sense of history, of simple cause and effect, and the wider interconnections (manifest to a blind seer) implied by the word 'tradition' was one of the central controversies that emerged from the first period of postcolonial writing, and was the subject of Derek Walcott's much-quoted essay 'The Muse of History'.<sup>16</sup> Walcott sees history, like 'single vision', as "that Medusa of the New World"<sup>17</sup> which, if it is emotionally confronted rather than viewed obliquely through the mirror of mythical narration, petrifies into a mere opposite of the injustice that is being indicted. This would produce "a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters."<sup>18</sup> The alternative to that sterile cycle is Walcott's vision of an Adamic process of naming, by which through an act of imagination the tradition of the New and Old World can be repossessed. The beauty of Caliban's speech can be separated from his rage. The elation which comes from "the elementary privilege of naming" is common to all the great poets "whether they are aligned by heritage to Crusoe and Propsero or to Friday and Caliban."<sup>19</sup> Walcott believes that a new Eden, formed amidst the "monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds, like the halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice"<sup>20</sup> will bring forth paradisaal fruits whose taste will have the "tartness of experience";<sup>21</sup> the bitter memories will not be erased by amnesia, but redeemed from the futile logic of conquest and counter-conquest. With that Eden comes

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>16</sup> Walcott, 'The Muse of History', originally published in Coombs (ed.), *Is Massa Day Dead?*, 1974, republished in Walcott, *What the Twilight Says*, pp. 36-64

<sup>17</sup> Walcott, 'The Muse of History' p. 36

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 37

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 40

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 64

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 41



"the recreation of the entire order, from religion to the simplest domestic rituals."<sup>22</sup> Referring to Eliot, who maintained that a culture cannot exist without a religion, Walcott emphasizes the complicity of the conquistadorial faith brought to the New World:

The tongues above our prayers utter the pain of entire races to the darkness of a Manichean God: *Dominus illuminatio mea*, for what was brought to this New World under the guise of divine light, the light of the sword blade and the light of *dominus illuminatio mea*, was the same iridescent serpent brought by a contaminating Adam, the same tortured Christ exhibited with Christian exhaustion, but what was also brought in the seeded entrails of the slave was a new nothing, a darkness which intensified the old faith.<sup>23</sup>

Against the divine light used as a standard to subdue the heathen, Walcott shows that raising an artificial past, a 'defunct cosmology without the tribal faith' as a substitute framework of belief, is also a surrender to history and a perverse primitivism. Walcott points instead to the gradual wresting of God from the captor, by which the slave was able to make the religion and its message of liberation from bondage truly his own. Walcott appears not to have been aware of it, but he could equally well have pointed to that other tradition, religious in its essence, which led from the Gnostics and Hermetists and ran counter to the dominant authority of Church, state and academic institutions, and which inspired Marlowe and Shakespeare, as we have seen, with its even more fundamental message of liberation for the human spirit. While, as Edward Said has shown, much of English literature is predicated on or at least complicit with the imperial project or the slave trade,<sup>24</sup> we have pointed out that Blake, the heir of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition, raised his voice against it. Yeats and Joyce, the founders of a postcolonial literature, whom Walcott admires, were aware of the Gnostic theme and worked actively within it. So it would be a mistake to see all of British society and its writers and poets as part of a homogeneous, monolithic, 'propaganda wing' of conquistadorial economic and social interests. Even a cursory reading of the autobiographies of many writers confirms that their sensibilities were often formed in direct opposition to these interests, which marginalized them for being 'sensitive', 'intellectual', 'homosexual', women, or any other tendency which the established order found suspicious.<sup>25</sup> Not to mention the large numbers of ordinary people, even within the system itself, who opposed the degradation and destruction of other cultures. In addition the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 40

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 39

<sup>24</sup> See the discussions in Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Ch 2, pp. 73-116.



Gnostic / Hermetic tradition furnished the idea of a magical, alchemical renewal to transcend time and affect the real world, and even the idea of an Adamic language, to which we must return in the next chapter.

Parallels to Walcott's essay can be observed in the way Dabydeen's narrator resists Mrs Rutherford's attempts to get him to identify with the African artifacts which would give him a false past and make him succumb to a bogus idea of history. Significantly, he even alludes to '*Dominus illuminatio mea*', which, in Dabydeen's book, is associated with the motto of Oxford University Press: the literary tradition as the true enlightenment to be possessed, as the *Ex Libris* plates inform us, by Joseph Countryman Esq. The name is deliberately chosen, as it was attached to a character in *The Intended*, Dabydeen's first novel, for an illiterate black British Rasta who is also a kind of genius, and who, like the Caribbean Adam whom Walcott proposes, can come to repossess in his 'country' the tradition which has humiliated and marginalized him.

The histories of the people mentioned in the books' dedications are also subject to quantum indeterminacy. The widely differing fates proposed for them by the narrator after the moment of their inscription within the books indicate the poles of possibility, which are equally likely. The suggestion is made, and reiterated throughout the book, that a career, a life, can veer from one extreme to the other by what appears to be chance, or a whim of fate, and that seemingly clear facts, as soon as they are observed differently or subjected to different narrations, shift radically until they vanish in the mutual cancellation of contradiction. The narrator seeks a story that will follow the cool, rational single vision of mimesis to impose order on the chaotic turbulence of 'reality'. As Mrs Rutherford points out:

'I suspect the trouble with you is that things have to make obvious sense, and if they don't, you give up. It's your training as an engineer — everything has to be straightforward: blocks of stone fitting neatly beside each other, cogs grooving into other cogs and all that.'

'What else is there?' I answered, knowing that there was something else but wanting her to tell me.

'There's the sinuous, the curved, the circular, the zigzagged, the unpredictable, the zany, the transcendental and the invisibly buried. There are stories enough in the brick houses, crooked and abrupt stories that contradict their seamless straight line. The tower

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<sup>25</sup> E.g. Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, or the work of Siegfried Sassoon, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster or D. H. Lawrence.



blocks are perfectly vertical to your engineering eyes, but they're drunk and blurred with human stories.<sup>26</sup>

This task can indeed be traced back to the definition of the engineer's task given by the narrator's Guyanese schoolmaster: "An engineer is a man who builds a dam against the wild sea. An engineer makes things spick and span, he straightens out whatever is lopsided."<sup>27</sup> Yet the narrator's dams in Guyana, and, it is suggested, his English project, do not achieve permanence. The sea eventually returns and washes them away. Newtonian laws founder when the flux of opposites cannot be artificially separated, and the attempt to impose mimetic order is similarly doomed.

A radical uncertainty extends to the other characters and even to material things, which alter before one's eyes:

From a safe distance his cottage had the appearance of a picturesque shambles ... It was the kind of dwelling you'd imagine a hermit to be inhabiting, in an English fairy tale from one of my story-books. When I looked again I could see it for what it was — woodwormed, crippled with hatred, wanting to crash to the ground more catastrophically than the cliff's fall.<sup>28</sup>

This description of the Irish labourer Christie's house follows a meeting in which Christie tells the narrator that all his assumptions are false, that his English mentor is a crook and the whole of his project bogged in corruption:

It's all stories. Everything is stories. If you want certainty take up a shell from the beach, put your ears to it and listen to what the ghost of the flesh that lived in it is telling you. What you hear might as well be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Today I've been your shell, tomorrow you'll find another. Mr Curtis is blooming, Professor Fenwick is an honest priest, Rushton is the kind of manager that martyrs are made of.<sup>29</sup>

Mrs Rutherford warns the narrator: "Don't be taken in by him"<sup>30</sup> but some critics have been misled into thinking that what Mrs Rutherford says can be taken at face value. In view of the author's repeated stress on the unreliability of any report, this would simply be ingenuous. So what Mrs Rutherford has to say about her vanished husband Jack and his perverted sexual excesses, or about the mysterious Mr Curtis and his contribution to saving the crumbling cliff, must also be taken with a grain of salt. As personalities in a traditional realistic sense, all these characters simply vanish in explicit or implied contradictions:

Take Jack. There's not a trace of him here, yet we keep mentioning his name. Take Curtis. He's a photograph in a newspaper and a lot of descriptions, that's all. As to the

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<sup>26</sup> Dabydeen, *Disappearance*, p. 75

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 60

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 168f.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 167f.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 74



villagers, I've rarely seen any of them in real life. They might as well be Christie's ghosts.<sup>31</sup>

The effect of all this is to shatter the idea of fiction as a mimetic representation of things as they are (*on kai me on*), or in other words faith in the representation of a perceivable reality subject to distinctive universal categories which could be empirically evaluated, replacing it with the primacy of the imagination expressed through story and language. Dabydeen is thus reopening a very old debate on the relations between the psyche as the subject and the world as the object, a debate which we have seen in previous chapters to centre on the role of the imagination, especially since the first edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* formulated resistance against Faustian seduction by the apparent reality of the material, and the subsequent collapse of the solipsistic imagination in the Romantic period put a premature end to that resistance.<sup>32</sup>

At this point a digression is needed to bring the debate up to date. Following the Cartesian split between the thinking subject and the perceived or posited object, which we have followed from a different perspective in the emergence of the scientific mentality from the magical-imaginative concerns of the Renaissance, the project of determining the nature of external reality in order to conquer and manipulate it culminated in the belief, following Newton, that the laws of the universe and material reality would ultimately be knowable. The path towards knowledge, it was assumed, was by observation involving exclusion of the observing subject, and the application of rational logic based on the distinctions constituted by, and constituting, consciousness. With the discovery of quantum indeterminacy these certainties fell away, and the Newtonian 'single vision' project was left with the hope that at some point in the future a 'Second Coming' of a Grand Unified Theory

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 157

<sup>32</sup> See also Ch 5. The history of this debate is summarized pithily by Cornelius Castoriades in his essay 'Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary' in Robinson and Rundell (Eds), *Rethinking Imagination*, pp. 136-46; on the specific question of Kant and the transcendental imagination, see John Rundell, 'Creativity and Judgement: Kant on Reason and Imagination', *ibid.*, pp. 87-117. The way in which the postmodern period may offer a new way of approaching the debate between Romanticism and the Enlightenment is summarized by David Roberts in 'Sublime Theories: Reason and Imagination in Modernity' in the same collection, pp. 171-85. It is also, of course, the subject of Richard Kearney's splendid study *The Wake of Imagination*, in which he is particularly concerned to chart the descent of the postmodern imagination into apparent parodic free play of intertextual association in the absence of a reliable empirical or social foundation of reality.



would resolve the contradictions and ambiguities which had made the object partly dependent on the observer.<sup>33</sup>

A series of attacks from within and outside the scientific community emphasized the shift that was occurring parallel to the collapse of other 'master narratives'. Writers such as Hayles and Irigaray<sup>34</sup> have shown that science, far from being 'objective', is permeated with cultural assumptions, so that, as Gyorgy Markus has written:

The 'rationality' of scientific development has no internal guarantees. Its standards and criteria, which make operational the idea of 'objective truth' (in the Kantian sense of the word), ensure, in principle, the revisability of the results of earlier, 'externally' influenced, choices between competing theories and interpretations, but they ensure it only under the condition that there is, again, 'external', social space and motivation for their effectuation.<sup>35</sup>

The controversy has recently become better-known by the name of 'Science Wars', and reached a peak of surrealist parody in the 'Sokal Affair', the publication by the journal *Social Text* of an article by the physicist Alan Sokal purporting to argue "physical 'reality', no less than social 'reality', is at bottom a social and linguistic construct" and announcing the advent of a 'liberatory science' that would 'transgress the boundaries' of the natural sciences and the humanities.<sup>36</sup> Sokal subsequently made it clear that his article was a parody designed to "defend what one might call a scientific worldview — defined broadly as respect for evidence and logic and for the incessant confrontation of theories with the real world, in short for reasoned argument over wishful thinking, superstition and demagoguery."<sup>37</sup> As

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<sup>33</sup> See Ch 6. Hans Primas offers a reminder of Pauli's insight that even 'scientific' ideas are often rooted in, and fatally contaminated with, archetypal projections. On the theory of atomism, for instance, he writes: "Vergisst man aber den Projektionscharakter des Atomismus, d.h. glaubt man, die Projektion stelle eine äussere Realität dar, so ist eine inflatorische Faszination nicht leicht zu vermeiden. In der Tat erleben noch heute viele Naturwissenschaftler ihre atomistische Projektion als eine Eigenschaft der Materie. Damit wird der naive Glaube, dass der molekulare Reduktionismus die Lösung der Welträtsel bringen könnte, vielleicht etwas verständlicher." (If the nature of atomism as a projection is forgotten, however, i.e. if it is believed that the projection is external reality, inflationary fascination is hard to avoid. Even nowadays, indeed, many scientists experience their atomistic projections as a material quality. That may make it easier to understand the naive belief that molecular reductionism could provide a solution to the mysteries of the universe.) (Primas, 'Über dunkle Aspekte der Naturwissenschaft' in Atmanspacher, Primas & Wertenschlag (Eds.), *Der Pauli-Jung Dialog*, p. 231 — my translation)

<sup>34</sup> e.g. Luce Irigaray, 'Is the Subject of Science Sexed?' in *Cultural Critique* 1 (1985), pp. 73-88, N. Katherine Hayles, 'Turbulence in Literature and Science: Questions of Influence' in Scholnick (Ed.), *American Literature and Science*, pp. 229-50

<sup>35</sup> Markus, 'A Society of Culture: the Constitution of Modernity' in Robertson and Rundell (Eds), *Rethinking Imagination*, p. 27. These arguments can also be found expressed by Sandra Harding, one of the critics attacked by Alan Sokal.

<sup>36</sup> Alan D. Sokal, 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity' in *Social Text* 46/47, 1996, pp. 217-52

<sup>37</sup> Sokal, Transcript of talk given at New York University, 30/10/1996, reprinted in *New Politics* 6 (2), (Winter 1997), pp. 126-9.



Stanley Aronowitz noted: "[Sokal] believes that reason, logic and truth are entirely unproblematic."<sup>38</sup> For Sokal the only vision is single, as becomes clear in his 'witty' reply to critics: "anyone who believes that the laws of physics are mere social conventions is invited to try transgressing those conventions from the windows of my apartment. (I live on the twenty-first floor.)"<sup>39</sup> — by which he neatly updates the second (Mephistophelian) temptation of Christ.

If the idea of reality itself has become indeterminate, the methods of perceiving it have been shown to be no less problematic. Niklas Luhmann, for example, shows that the premise of European rationalism, the ability to make valid distinctions, is fatally flawed because "the precondition of every rationality is a distinction which re-enters itself,"<sup>40</sup> giving rise to a paradox that "the distinction which re-enters itself is the same and not the same,"<sup>41</sup> while sense perception, as Castoriades reminds us, is also a creation of the senses from electromagnetic waves, air waves, kinds of molecules and so on. He cites Eddington's two tables:

*This table — the one I touch, I see, I lean on, etc. — contains an indefinite plurality of 'elements' created by the singular imagination and the social imaginary. The other 'table' — in fact, no 'table' at all — is a scientific construct, such as science makes it today. (And this does not make it any less imaginary in the sense of the word I am intending.)*<sup>42</sup>

This is the context of Derrida's deconstructionist assault on mimesis in *De la Grammatologie*, which Dabydeen uses as an epigraph for his novel: "What opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence." Derrida's argument is that the traditional value put on speech as anterior to writing and somehow nearer to the 'reality' which both refer to cannot be justified. 'Natural presence', which is a condition of ontological certainty, cannot be achieved. All speech, and writing, differ from that 'reality' and defer it, because they cannot be simultaneous in time. The result is a constant 'play' between the sign and what it is believed to refer to, which continually recedes. Taking Rousseau as a model, he mischievously points out that Rousseau's masturbatory substitute for what he believes to be the reality of the object of his desire is in fact all there is: 'il n'y a

<sup>38</sup> Aronowitz, *Dissent*, Winter 1997, pp. 107-110.

<sup>39</sup> Sokal, 'Transgressing the Boundaries: an Afterword', *Dissent*, 43(4), 1996, pp. 93-99 (note 3)

<sup>40</sup> Luhmann, 'European Rationality', in Robertson and Rundell (Eds), *Rethinking Imagination*, p. 78

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 79

<sup>42</sup> Castoriades, 'Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary' in Robertson and Rundell (Eds), *Rethinking Imagination*, p. 140 (author's emphases and parenthesis)



pas de hors-texte'.<sup>43</sup> This allows the old tyranny of the mimetic relationship to be broken, suggesting that the play of resonances between the reality of absence in the artistic image and the fiction of presence in the objective correlative of 'reality' is the only truth that can be counted on.

We can contrast with Derrida's deconstruction three important alternative initiatives. Firstly, Paul Ricoeur conceives of life configured through narrative in which the construction of a narrative identity on either the personal level or for a whole collective enables human beings to structure reality in the medium of the lived experience of time. This should be achieved by a scheme, the "application of a concept to an instant by a productive rule-governed imagination", not, as Kant envisaged it, hidden in the depths of the soul, but immanent in narrative.<sup>44</sup> This general configuration by 'emplotment' is not inherent in the text alone but in the effect on the reader: "the sense of the significance of a narrative stems from the *intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader*,"<sup>45</sup> so that "the act of reading completes the work, transforming it into a *guide* for reading, with its zones of indeterminacy, its latent wealth of interpretation, its power of being reinterpreted in new ways in new historical contexts."<sup>46</sup> Ricoeur thus links life and story to assert that "stories are recounted but they are also lived in the mode of the imaginary" allowing a social dimension to the configuration of reality around the process of reading to avoid the solipsism of the individual imagination:

In place of an *ego* enamoured of itself arises a *self* instructed by cultured symbols, the first among which are the narratives handed down in our literary tradition. And these narratives give us a unity which is not substantial but narrative.<sup>47</sup>

The second initiative is an attempt to avoid the danger that Wood recognizes in Ricoeur's model, an over-dependence on the 'mimetic imperative' or "the possibility of a certain closure of meaning,"<sup>48</sup> what Wilson Harris terms a 'frame' or 'block function', which is more appropriate to reading the literature of the 19th century than to the modern or the

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<sup>43</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), p. 227. The epigraph is drawn from later in the same passage, p.228.

<sup>44</sup> Wood, 'Interpreting Narrative' (a discussion of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*) in Wood (Ed.), *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, p. 4

<sup>45</sup> Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative' in Wood (Ed), *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, p. 26 (author's emphasis)

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33 (author's emphases)

<sup>48</sup> Wood, 'Interpreting Narrative' in Wood (Ed), *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, p. 6



postmodern. Instead 'radical constructivism', according to Ansgar Nünning, rejects the notion that representations are or could be pictures or replicas of a reality independent of the observer. "Constructivism is radical in that it no longer conceives of language as reflecting or being concerned with an objective ontological reality."<sup>49</sup> On the other hand all aspects of the observer's experience, including ideas and unspoken or unconscious beliefs that play a part in determining the perception and construction of a reality, thereby gain in legitimacy. Constructivism, Nünning points out, is a far cry from deconstruction:

In contrast to the deconstructionist approach, which eliminates the subject, does not recognize a 'self' definable independently of the network of linguistic relationships, and maintains that language and texts only obtain meaning in relation to other texts, constructivism recognizes that the individual is the sole source of values and meaning in his or her world and must therefore accept complete responsibility for his or her acts and choices.<sup>50</sup>

In the place of feats of verbal juggling constructivist criticism focuses on the cognitive strategies created in the work.

A third position is taken by N. Katherine Hayles, in an essay entitled 'Constrained Constructivism: Locating Scientific Inquiry in the Theater of Representation',<sup>51</sup> in which she attempts to steer a course away from radical constructivism, the 'non-realist' position which she sees as dangerously solipsistic and liable to a context of meaninglessness, without falling into the 'realist' trap. She recognizes the Faustian fate of all attempts to use an abrogated perception of the real world — the illusion of objectivity which is the knowledge Bacon uses as a power-base — seeing it as just that: a misuse of power which has privileged a gendered, masculine manipulation of the world. "The illusion that one can achieve an omniscient vantage point, and the coercive practices associated with this illusion, have been so thoroughly deconstructed that they do not need further comment here,"<sup>52</sup> she notes. But at the same time she is unwilling to give up the idea of representation entirely, since a totally arbitrary construction of a world, or even one based on a majority consensus, could be in the long run even more coercive with even less justification.

She suggests that what is perceived as reality 'out there' could be conceived as an 'unmediated flux'. The observer processes this in an interactive operation which provides a

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<sup>49</sup> Nünning, 'The Past is the Fiction of the Present' in Engler & Müller (Eds), *Historiographic Metafiction in Modern American and Canadian Literature*, p. 281

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 284

<sup>51</sup> Internet document: <http://englishwww.humnet.ucla.edu/HAYLES/Cusp.html>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



conception of reality within what she calls a 'theater of representation'. Between the two lies something she terms the 'cusp':

On one side of the cusp is the flux, inherently unknowable and unreachable by any sentient being. On the other side are the constructed concepts that for us comprise the world. Thinking only about the outside of the cusp leads to the impression that we can access reality directly and formulate its workings through abstract laws that are universally true. Thinking only about the inside leads to solipsism and radical subjectivism. The hardest thing in the world is to ride the cusp, to keep in the foreground of consciousness both the active transformations through which we experience the world and the flux that interacts with and helps to shape those transformations.<sup>53</sup>

The problem is that the term 'unmediated flux' is already a concept and thus moves into the theatre of representation, as does the idea of 'cusp' itself. Recognizing this, at least in part, Hayles seeks for an 'elusive negativity' that can elude the reflexive mirroring of pure textuality, while avoiding the 'pernicious' simulacrum figuring representation itself as a 'timeless reality'. Her attempt leads her to what she calls 'constrained constructivism' in which a distinction between congruity and consistency allows shared notions of constraints or boundaries to lend equal validity to differing interpretations.<sup>54</sup> For example gravity might equally be explained by mutual attraction between masses, the curvature of space, or the occult magnetism of kindred spirits, but none of these would posit a world where a person could hover outside Alan Sokal's window. The difficulty here, though it allows for cultural readings of science, is that it paradoxically makes the constraints themselves representations.

To avoid this in turn Hayles employs semiotics to overcome the binary logic of negation and affirmation (false v. true) to introduce the 'fuzzy' relations between not-true and not-false. By doing so she opens up a fourfold vision which allows positions of double negativity to emerge (both true and not-true, both false and not-false) at the points where the mapped grids and the diagonals of the positions they mark intersect.<sup>55</sup> The intersections Hayles identifies not only as places of 'novelty and paradoxical emergence' but also places which defy description as long as they remain within the 'prison-house of language', and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> This relates, it seems to me, to Richard Rorty's view of the struggle between idealism and materialism (in various guises like C. P. Snow's 'two cultures' or late 20th century 'techies' versus 'fuzzies') as an end to the attempt to "take possession of the inner citadel of the universe being superceded in Gadamer's "Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache" — "Being that can be understood is language" — which he sees leading to a 'domination-free' conversation, a term he borrows from Habermas. (Rorty, 'Being that can be understood is language', *London Review of Books*, 16 March 2000, pp. 23ff.)

<sup>55</sup> The reader will recognize the analogy between this place of negativity, the cusp itself, and the seignior of Faust, the impossible border between the conscious and the unconscious. It is also the place where it becomes possible to juggle, giving and taking with the same action, as Dimetos learns from Lydia.



can only be articulated by what I have called in this study metonymy, which Hayles refers to as 'metaphorics':

Like other representations of scientific inquiry, constrained constructivism corresponds to a particular view of language. The view of language correlative with it can be found within the emerging field of metaphorics.<sup>56</sup>

The idea of metaphor as the source of extended meaning and creativity by which the 'real' and the 'unreal', the sense of a construction of a reality (from 'out there') or a manifestation of meaning (from within), could be reconciled brings us back to Ricoeur, who describes the process of metaphor, the classical 'extension of meaning', as follows: "It consists in the rapprochement in which the logical distance between farflung semantic fields suddenly falls away, creating a semantic shock which, in turn, sparks the meaning of the metaphor." And this in turn is seen by Ricoeur as the function of the creative imagination: "Imagination is the apperception, the sudden view, of a new predicative pertinence."<sup>57</sup>

The moment occurs, by this definition, at the intersection between two separate 'dimensions' of meaning and is thus best visualized three-dimensionally or four-dimensionally rather than two dimensionally, the intersection opening an unexpected vista which may run counter to logic. There is an interesting parallel here with the theory of creativity outlined by Arthur Koestler. He uses the term 'bisociation' for the intersection<sup>58</sup> and he shows how in it the same imaginative process sparks humour, scientific discovery, and art: "When two independent matrices of perception or reasoning interact with each other the result [...] is either a *collision* ending in laughter, or their *fusion* in a new intellectual synthesis, or their *confrontation* in an aesthetic experience."<sup>59</sup> Each of these intersections sparks explosive effects at the moment when the totality of each matrix, in sudden full view of the other, is simultaneously cancelled and extended, producing an immediate emotional reaction, of laughter, of wonder, or of numinous aesthetic awe.<sup>60</sup> The transcendent moment of intersection is, however, dependent on the matrices remaining implicit. If the joke is explained, the effect vanishes.

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<sup>56</sup> Internet document: <http://englishwww.humnet.ucla.edu/HAYLES/Cusp.html>

<sup>57</sup> Ricoeur, 'Imagination in Discourse and Action' in Robertson and Rundell (Eds), *Rethinking Imagination*, p. 122

<sup>58</sup> Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p. 35

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 45



If the transcendent moment sparked by the crossing of the matrices, the encounter with the 'cusp', is indicative both of a reality which defies description and of a transcendent truth of imagination which manifests itself in the world of perception, then 'poetic' language, fiction, with its paths of meaning through metaphor, resonance, allusion, image, ambiguity and intertextuality, ceases to be ornamental or play in the sense of amusement but becomes the deconstructive tool with which false hegemonies can be demolished and the constructive architecture of meaning.<sup>61</sup> It opens up a new evaluation of accounts of the creation of the world, for instance in the Australian Dreamtime, which couple the creation song (or poësis) of the totem ancestor (comparable with the Anthropos) to the physical emergence of the features of the world, and the need for constant interaction between them to maintain the health and integrity of both creator and creation. It also confirms the relationship of such a language of the imagination to the language of dream, and justifies further interest in the inner pole of the source of constructed meaning within the psyche of the observer.

In recent years, particularly through Lacan, this interest has centred on Freudian psychoanalysis. There are two problems about this. First, Freud's attempt to construct his theories on precisely the kind of single vision rationalism which we have shown fiction to have superseded, and second the fact that Freudian analysis is concerned to narrate a successful therapy of precisely the same ontic-realistic external world in which the drives of Eros and Thanatos are conceived to exist. The alternative, as we have shown in a previous chapter, is suggested by Jung's investigation of a psyche whose structure and dynamics take account of the numinous, integrate the personal and the collective, operate quasi-independently of time, and through synchronicity are capable of interacting with perceived reality in a relationship of meaning.<sup>62</sup>

Besides the epigraph from Derrida which opens the question of the relations between perception and reality, Dabydeen has included others as clues to approach his novel. One of them is from Wilson Harris's novel *The Secret Ladder*: "All at once he leaned down and splashed the liquid extravagantly on his face to clear away all doubt of a concrete

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<sup>60</sup> Koestler's resulting theory of jokes, at once inclusive of and immeasurably more powerful than the classic theories of Bergson and Freud, deserves to be better known. His analysis of scientific discovery is similarly full of insight, but he is unaccountably disappointing in what he says about the 'artistic' end of the spectrum.

<sup>61</sup> This opens up a field of reference to Heidegger, which goes beyond the scope of this thesis. The reader is referred to David Halliburton's study *Poetic Thinking*.



existence,"<sup>63</sup> which illustrates what we have been discussing. The gesture of splashing the mirroring water on the face breaks the surface to bring it in contact with the skin, but destroys the reflected evidence of the face's concrete existence, and thus destabilizes the sense of 'doubt' to create multiple ambiguity. Is his existence concrete or not? Does it, itself, cast doubt? Harris describes the process of his fiction as the interaction of the imagination with the unconscious:

As an imaginative writer I work with narrative which I revise by scanning each draft for clues which lodge themselves in the draft, clues that may appear to have been planted by another hand [...]. The unconscious mind has come up, has addressed the conscious mind, and the ramifications of that dialogue become of immense importance.<sup>64</sup>

Harris goes on to explain how the 'block functions' of the mould of petrified processes and attitudes can be broken in fiction, so that an apparently illiterate peasant woman (Beti in *The Far Journey of Oudin*) achieves creativity:

Some kind of stimulus happens which allows her to break the mould and then she reads him, as if she is creating a fiction. So we have this peculiar position in which she creates him as a fiction and he creates her as a fiction. And we find then that the uniform text is broken.<sup>65</sup>

The fiction emerges from a ground which is the 'soil' of tradition, though it may no longer be conscious, so that "the author seems to disappear in the sense that the text comes alive, comes profoundly alive as if the true source of the text is tradition."<sup>66</sup> Tradition, not history.

Harris emphasizes that this disappearance of the author is no mere postmodernist play:

The way I diverge from the post-modernists — I must insist on this — is that the post-modernists have discarded depth, they have discarded the unconscious, thus all they are involved in is a game, whereas what I am saying is not just a game. I am convinced that there is a tradition in depth *which returns, which nourishes us though it appears to have vanished*, and that it creates a fiction in ways in which the creative imagination comes into dialogue with clues of revisionary moment. The spectral burden of vanishing and re-appearing is at the heart of the writer's task.<sup>67</sup>

The tension between disappearance and appearance which informs Dabydeen's novel is nowhere clearer than in the way he surrounds his nameless narrator with a mischievous and resonant tapestry of names to weave a multivalent intertextuality between his own fiction, a world of tradition, an inner world of archetypes and an outer world of perceived and lived reality. Intertextuality is thus less a device than a mode in which *Disappearance* is written,

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<sup>62</sup> See Ch 6.

<sup>63</sup> from Wilson Harris, *The Guyana Quartet*, p. 357

<sup>64</sup> Wilson Harris, 'Literacy and the Imagination' in *Selected Essays*, p. 80

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 82

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 82 (author's emphasis)



and it emerges that the texts and contexts the author has used are just as significant as the repertoire of a conventional novel, because this complex metonymic process is employed in a way normally associated with the poetic image, to set up resonances which may reach deep into the reader's imagination. These texts are presences which have 'disappeared', and yet which haunt the book with their uncanny absence.

The name Mrs Rutherford, for instance, sets up two distinct resonances. The outstanding nuclear physicist Ernest Rutherford (1871-1937) provides a link with the theme of the engineer. His stature and significance in the culture are indicated by his burial place next to Newton, his research having a direct bearing on the most spectacular manipulation of the material world, the development of nuclear weapons. As a New Zealander, he also echoes the theme of interaction between periphery and metropolis.<sup>68</sup> At the same time there is significance in the fact that Anna Rutherford is the name of a distinguished editor of a postcolonial journal,<sup>69</sup> a reminder that Mrs Rutherford is continually urging the narrator to identify with an African past and stressing the evils of the colonial encounter. In this she is also advocating the kind of 'single vision' Walcott is trying to resist.<sup>70</sup>

On an aural level, the assonance between 'Rutherford' and 'mother' points up the way that archetypes are fractured and refracted through the book. The narrator feels attracted to the motherly landlady with a kind of repulsion suggestive of incestuous desire: "I looked away, faintly nauseated by the possibility of her embrace, the closing of her fulsome creased flesh about mine,"<sup>71</sup> and her urging of a one-sided attitude is a mirror image of the narrator's real mother in Guyana, a black woman who believes that only whites can create order out of chaos: "'Why everything black people handle become ruination and ash?' she asked, looking directly at me as I swung in the hammock. 'Is like King Midas in reverse. What he touch turn gold but we convert things to bush and blackness like we own skin.'"<sup>72</sup> It is a fixation

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 86 (author's emphasis). We shall see in a subsequent chapter that the tradition Harris alludes to is the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition we have been tracing in this thesis.

<sup>68</sup> Dabydeen has informed me that the village where he was born in Guyana was on Plantation Zealand.

<sup>69</sup> The journal is *Kunapipi*.

<sup>70</sup> This parallels Mr Pringle, the abolitionist who tries to shape and contain Mungo's anarchic story in Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress* (1999)

<sup>71</sup> Dabydeen, *Disappearance*, p. 76

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 63. In the narrator's classmate Jamal, too, his mother's humiliation at Mr Leroy's hands causes Jamal to emulate for a time Mr Leroy's engineering ideals and become a model pupil (pp. 58f.) before his fellow-pupils, tired of his sneaking, discover that insulting his mother reduces him to the incompetence



and smothering embrace from which the narrator has not escaped. His attraction to Annette, the canteen waitress in Guyana, is based on the size of her breasts and the fact that "I saw my mother in her."<sup>73</sup> When Swami, the Indian-descended labourer on the Guyanese dam, complains that he spends all his time with books instead of women, the narrator reacts furiously when he picks up a picture of his mother, asking if she "is wife or is sweet-woman?"<sup>74</sup> This is something Mrs Rutherford recognizes: "You were never in love. The only person you've ever cared for is your mother."<sup>75</sup>

The absence of the narrator's Guyanese father can now be brought into proximity with a range of 'father-figures' as shattered manifestations of the father-archetype. One of these is Professor Fenwick. Dabydeen has acknowledged his debt to Wilson Harris for the name of the engineer / surveyor in *The Secret Ladder*, by which further layers of resonance and intertextuality enter the novel.<sup>76</sup> Not only the confrontation in the Harris novel between the engineering skills used by Fenwick to control the river and its flooding and the world of Poseidon and the former slaves which Fenwick experiences as alien and threatening, but Harris's own techniques of interweaving the conscious and unconscious worlds come into play here, as well as the tribute of the younger writer to a sense of literary tradition established by the generation which came to prominence in the 60s, particularly Harris, Selvon, Walcott, Lamming and Naipaul. Jack and Curtis, similarly, share with the narrator's real father the fact of absence. Jack is the magician who disappeared one day in a 'puff of smoke'.<sup>77</sup> The date of his disappearance corresponds with the date of Guyanese independence<sup>78</sup> and the narrator's sexual maturity, providing an illustration of the way synchronicity resonates between the 'inner' world of fiction and the 'outer world' of

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which again earns Mr Leroy's bullying violence. For the narrator it is confirmation that there is "no truth to anything" (p. 62). The idea of individual progress and 'improvement' is thus also destabilized.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 86

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 29

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 140. Note also in this context the exchange between the narrator and Mrs Rutherford in which her remark: "Perhaps that's why you are driven, because you're always on edge, either between your mother and a lover or..." prompts the narrator to recall Swami: "He told me I lived at the edge of a ruler, afraid to venture off in case I collapsed in a heap of madness." (p. 158)

<sup>76</sup> See Dabydeen's hilariously 'calypsoed' version of how Harris gave him permission for this borrowing in the interview given to Kwame Dawes in 1994, in *The Art of David Dabydeen*, p. 210, for a good illustration of Dabydeen's playful fictionalisation of autobiographical details. The public face and carnival exterior of such utterances should however never fool the critic into doubting the deep seriousness and passionately thoughtful intelligence of Caribbean writers, even if his or her solemnity occasionally earns a guffaw of ridicule.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 5



perception and history. Mention of Jack recalls the novel's second epigraph, from Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*. Naipaul provides the setting and tone of the narration. It is a skilful, if ironic tribute that Dabydeen so deftly catches the exact cadences of Naipaul's prose. The unemotional, autobiographical voice, the sharpness of detail, probing outside and within the narrative personality, the peripatetic excursions round an enigmatic point are all techniques used in *The Enigma of Arrival*, which also sees a West Indian in a rural setting of central historical significance (with Naipaul it is Stonehenge) seeking the nature of his relationship with England and finding it through a character called Jack, or more particularly Jack's garden, his pride and joy while he lives, but concreted over for a new building after his death:

My ideas about Jack were wrong. He was not exactly a remnant; he had created his own life, his own world, almost his own continent. But the world about him, which he so enjoyed and used, was too precious not to be used by others. And it was only when he had gone, it was only then that I saw how tenuous, really, the hold of all these people had been on the land they worked or lived in.<sup>79</sup>

*The Enigma of Arrival* as a meditation on De Chirico's painting of an enigmatic borderline between arrival and departure, presence and absence, the impossible Faustian realm, is another indication that seemingly immovable and static imperial conditions are in fact subject to constant fluctuation, like the changing outlines of sea-coasts.

Absconded, dead or reclusive, the father-figures have withdrawn, leaving a shadowy presence as a reminder of the magician's quest for power over things, the attempt to use technology to control nature, the belief that the flux of time can be controlled in straight lines.<sup>80</sup> The phallically-named Wally Pearce, the engineer on the Guyana sea-wall, is said by Swami, the Indian worker who claims to be in contact with the spirits of the land, to be planning "one straight clean-cut fuck". He links technology with phallocentric post-imperialism:

... like how your bulldozer blade does slice a line in the land. All-you people is straight-line folk, all-you does live along ruler's edge. The white man who used to rule you so fulsomely left you with a plastic ruler to rule you.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> The actual date of independence has been altered in the fiction.

<sup>79</sup> V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p.87. The fact that Mrs Rutherford's dog is also called Jack (because, she claims, it is a Jack Russell terrier), who scratches in the garden as though its master was buried there (Dabydeen, *Disappearance*, p. 104) allows the ironic resonances to ripple even further.

<sup>80</sup> Jean Popeau associates these figures with the 'primacy of the same' bludgeoning the Other, which he follows Levinas in tracing back to the Socratic tradition. (Popeau, 'Disappearance' in Grant (Ed), *The Art of David Dabydeen*, p. 104)

<sup>81</sup> Dabydeen, *Disappearance*, p. 36



Swami himself, who in spite of his contempt for the narrator's technology will be mangled by its machinery, is a magician of another type: "I does stray about in circles. I does curl and disappear like smoke ring and reappear somewhere else. I already done convolute and circumnavigate the world before I come to this spot."<sup>82</sup> He is the trickster, the alchemical spirit Mercurius, the shape-shifter, catalyst and bringer of wisdom, replicated in Christie,<sup>83</sup> but also in the enigmatic Alfred, Mr Roosevelt, the alcoholic sage of the narrator's boyhood, who shares with Swami the honour of being elevated to the status of a god: the god of coincidence. It is synchronicity masquerading as mere coincidence that allows him, as 'Freddo', to score the first goal at the village's new American-built basketball pitch signalling another of the book's characteristic sets of appearance and disappearance; he temporarily rises from drunken penury to a kind of respectability before reverting to his old ways, as the basketball pitch reverts to bush, or the drained land is once again swamped by the sea.

It is Alfred who activates the narrator's imagination, telling him that "real life is abroad and big-big stories"<sup>84</sup> and sending him to the sea-wall to watch for three days with the promise of a gift if he can report on three things in detail.<sup>85</sup> The boy returns, having seen only the sea, and makes up elaborate lies from his own imagination. Alfred comments that he "must have the clearest eyesight in the village" before asking if he did not see God; "You got to close your eyes if you want to see God, like you praying."<sup>86</sup> But the narrator is unable to appreciate the paradoxical significance of the sea as infinite matrix of the imagination from which all images can be born, seeing only emptiness without pattern.<sup>87</sup> He scorns the crooked lines Alfred sews with his sewing-machine, the amorphous sea, but also the authoritarian order of the four eyes of the basketball pitch lights, which he shatters (laying

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 36

<sup>83</sup> As Swami's name recalls a Hindu religious teacher, so Christie suggests the Christian.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 51

<sup>85</sup> The association, here and elsewhere, of numbers based on three with the sea is significant. In alchemical and Jungian literature three is an imperfect number, suggesting that a missing fourth element needs to be provided to achieve totality. The four lights round the basketball pitch, though suggesting totality, are artificial and imposed.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 52

<sup>87</sup> The narrator makes it clear that withdrawal from the sea would be withdrawal into silence. (p. 17) It is significant that Dabydeen also stresses the role of the sea in his poem *Turner*. "I deliberately set the poem in the sea. Most of it takes place in the actuality of the sea, and the sea is actual, not just as the location of the drowned man, but in the rhythms of the poem." *The Art of David Dabydeen*, p.205.



the blame on Jamal), reducing God's eyeball to the muddy remnants of a slashed basketball, and he chooses instead the human engineer's straight lines and the dam.

Dabydeen's third epigraph has an even more far-reaching multitextual significance. The reference, "Mistah Kurtz — he dead", is obviously to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but mediated through T. S. Eliot in *The Hollow Men*, whose epigraph the words themselves form. That poem in turn, in which the Shadow falls "Between the idea / And the reality"<sup>88</sup> points on towards the meditation in the rose-garden of the *Four Quartets*, to the dry pool transmuted by the lotus growing from the "heart of light".<sup>89</sup> Eliot's words on the redemption of time through language, on the still dance of words reaching into silence: "Caught in the form of limitation / Between un-being and being"<sup>90</sup> penetrate to the heart of the Gnostic / Hermetic mystery<sup>91</sup> and call to mind that Conrad's novella, in addition to its significance in colonial and postcolonial discourse, is a modern Faust story.

Kurtz's vision, set out in his 'pamphlet' for the Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, beginning with a claim to "might as of a deity" which gives the "notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence"<sup>92</sup> but whose "magic current of phrases" leads to the final demonic scrawl, "Exterminate all the brutes!" is a Faustian flight and fall from heroic dreams to brutal hubris, and Marlow, whose name is not chosen gratuitously, follows in his footsteps. Marlow's acceptance of the steamship command bears all the hallmarks of a satanic pact signed at the hell-mouth of the company office with three weird women in attendance, two knitting and the third a secretary, who are the Fates or the same triple aspect of Hecate taken by Fugard from the Blake print for Sophia's dream of the 'dark' Lydia.<sup>93</sup> Marlow too, like Kurtz, almost succumbs to the inner darkness which gathers over the Thames as much as the Congo; unlike the 'harlequin' Russian, whose admiration for Kurtz remains undimmed but seems to work no poison, and who, in obtaining a pair of Marlow's shoes, marks himself out as a projection of the spirit Mercurius in a further trickster form. It is when Marlow's eyes follow the Russian's glance that he first sees the 'gorgeous apparition' walking with measured steps and head held high, like the land's

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<sup>88</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, p. 85

<sup>89</sup> from 'Burnt Norton', *Ibid.*, p. 172

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175

<sup>91</sup> although Eliot himself appears not to have been aware of it

<sup>92</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 83



"image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul"<sup>94</sup> — the Helen of Kurtz's own lost soul.

Marlow cannot bring back the words for what he has experienced, the only words wrung from the despairing Kurtz:

Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, — he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath —  
"The horror! The horror!"<sup>95</sup>

Yet he brings back the vision to the sepulchral city, a vision which enters the house with him like a procession of a "heart of conquering darkness"<sup>96</sup> to tell the lie (which is not one) to Kurtz's 'Intended', "a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of pure crystal",<sup>97</sup> for when he tells her that Kurtz's final word was: "Your name,"<sup>98</sup> it is a recognition that the light Anima is also the dark, an inextricable syzygy,<sup>99</sup> that Helen represents both the temptation of the material world and its redemption, that Lydia is both the occasion of Dimetos' fall and his rescue. This is what Dabydeen brings to this novel from Conrad, a presence as marked as that in his first, *The Intended*, and yet, paradoxically, a perilous muse most noted by her disappearance.<sup>100</sup>

That absence indicates a presence in the writer's imagination, on a level 'outside' the novel itself, and thus beyond the concern of literary criticism but within the realm of texts and their translations. By the principle of synchronicity such presences may constellate and signify in a pattern across the 'lived' lives of author or reader, of society and nation, binding the minute particulars of individual lives to the myths and stories of the greatest and the least. This infinity of meaning is profoundly democratic and profoundly dangerous, requiring "profoundest self-confessional imagination"<sup>101</sup> that admits and accepts powerlessness at the

<sup>93</sup> See Ch. 7

<sup>94</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 99

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 112

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 117

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 114

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 123

<sup>99</sup> This point is also made by Michael Gilkes in *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*, p. 21 (note 49)

<sup>100</sup> The narrator forms no relationship to correspond with the author's during his stay in Fairlight, Sussex.

<sup>101</sup> Wilson Harris, 'The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination' in *Selected Essays*, p. 258. In the same essay Harris quotes from his novel *The Four Banks of the River of Space*: "Perhaps I was the medium of the dance in touching the earth, in touching the light, in touching the sculpture of appearances as if every structure one shaped, or ordered, or visualized, was a sacred infusion of slow-motion lightning into substance, substance into life." and expands on the phrase 'slow-motion lightning' as follows: "a visualization of the energies of the cosmos as sleeping / waking life, as station and expedition, as the transfiguration of technologies into a therapeutic edge within the malaise of gross materialism that threatens to destroy our planet." (Ibid., p. 259)



moment that a great power comes into its reach — an alchemical and magical power to take part in creating the world.

At the intersection of the unconscious sea of turbulent archetypal resources with the dry land of conscious decisions, history, and cultural manifestations fiction posits a shimmering symbol. In *Disappearance* it is a flower, "dried and grown flat, yet still retaining some of its violent colour".<sup>102</sup> It is neither mimetic description nor arbitrary play. It is not an action that has 'befallen' which can drag one down, but an action which has happened and not happened, carrying one in its constant presence / non-presence, showing in otherness the measure of one's own fall.<sup>103</sup> Dunsmere *is* the fictional Dunsmere, as it *is* the geographical village of Fairlight on the Sussex coast, as it *is* Dunwich, the drowned East Anglian town,<sup>104</sup> or any other 'place' threatened by the advancing sea, in any individual or collective life. Like a series of notes struck on a well-tuned instrument resounding sympathetically with others,<sup>105</sup> the sounds will extend into the depths of tradition and histories and individual lives, into the future too, making intersections and connections that in their turn spark creative exchanges and revaluations and constitute an irrational but redemptive magic.



21. Fairlight cliff from the beach

<sup>102</sup> Dabydeen, *Disappearance*, p. 180. The reader will note the correspondence with the Blue Flower of the Romantic imagination (see Ch. 5)

<sup>103</sup> One may recall the grand piano thrown overboard at the end of Jane Campion's film *The Piano*.

<sup>104</sup> Where, according to Roland Parker in *Men of Dunwich* (London: Collins, 1978), the dissension and petty squabbles among the inhabitants in the 13th to 16th centuries closely matched the description of the course of the campaign to save Dunsmere cliff which the narrator finds in Mrs Rutherford's press clippings file. Indeed, they seem to have contributed to the fate of the medieval port.

<sup>105</sup> The German Romantics were fascinated by phenomena of resonance, like the spontaneous notes of the Aeolian harp.





22. On the cliff at Fairlight



23. Brighton village, Courentyne, Guyana



## Chapter Nine

### The Magic Wound: Derek Walcott's *Omeros*

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At the conclusion of the previous chapter it became clear that if the concept of reality is destabilized and the hegemony of *on kai me on*, things as they are, is overcome, the principle of mimesis, the grounding in one particular pole, is also ended. There is no reason to privilege one term of a metaphor over the other, as the apparent perception traditionally regarded as real is as much of a construct as the symbol or comparison: both exist and both are components of the creative imagination. The two move in a synchronistic dance with each other, simultaneously cancelling each other out and sparking transcendent meaning.<sup>1</sup> This will naturally have a bearing, too, on questions of 'influence' or 'mimicry' which are often raised in association with Derek Walcott's extended narrative poem *Omeros*. For as soon as one uses the term 'epic' one usually lets oneself in for a discussion on the patronage of the great predecessors in the epic tradition, the assumption being that an author either wishes to borrow their glory or to deconstruct them in some ironic or parodic sense.<sup>2</sup> Such arguments, however, assume that the products of the creative imagination privilege precedence in time (through the laws of cause and effect) and eurocentrism (by presuming that all culture moves from the centre to the periphery). The end of mimetic hegemony, and the possibility that images form in similar archetypal patterns in widely differing cultures as part of what Jung termed the collective unconscious renders those assumptions invalid. I have suggested, for example, that a reading of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that accepts at face value Marlow's description of his report to Kurtz's Intended as a lie (though he himself points out that the heavens do not fall), which by implication would make her magnificent counterpart in the African forests an inferior echo of her presence, would simply be to privilege the conscious over the unconscious, the white over the black. Accepting them as

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<sup>1</sup> See p.219 (previous chapter)

<sup>2</sup> John Thieme, noting this is not the case with *Omeros*, points out that "few of the episodes are closely patterned on the earlier epic." (Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, p. 153)



the two halves of an inseparable syzygy, yin and yang, the Tai Chi, would not only make sense in Conrad's terms (in alignment with his puzzlingly insistent description of Marlow as resembling a Buddha) but would lend the work a new stature in the literature of hybridity.<sup>3</sup>

Dabydeen's engineer learns that his attempts to impose mimetic order on the turbulence of the sea are doomed to failure, and that the spirit Mercurius, curling like smoke disappearing and appearing unconstrained by laws of time and space, will bring him a new gift of imaginative story. The revelation comes to him on a beach, as it does to Dimetos before him, or to both Newton and Blake. It is the seigniory of Faust, but also Prospero's beach, where Ariel, who comes from a tree, will be released to the air and the sea.<sup>4</sup>

In *Omeros* it is the trees themselves, the *laurier-cannelles*, that are released to a fruitful engagement with the sea. They are the old gods from a time before even the Aruac came to the island, a tradition reaching back into the beginnings of the land. The old gods metamorphose into boats: "Tree! You can be a canoe! Or else you cannot!"<sup>5</sup> (where the 'canot'/'cannot' pun expresses the subtle necessity of their transformation). In the place of their plurality stands a pillar of absence, "a blue space / for a simple God where the old gods stood before".<sup>6</sup> The one absent God replaces the sacred projected into nature, but that is the price for their eager conversion into craft by which Achille and Hector can attach their lives to the sea.<sup>7</sup> Achille's canoe is baptized with a name chance gives it, but then fixed by the personality of its owner and namer: "Leave it! It God' spelling and mine."<sup>8</sup> In the wound where the trees once stood, looking up, Achille sees a sea of cloud. Walcott here introduces a literal illustration of the first principle of alchemy from the *Tabula Smaragdina*: "What is below is like what is above":<sup>9</sup>

He saw the hole silently healing with the foam  
of a cloud like a breaker. Then he saw the swift

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<sup>3</sup> This commonly used term needs to be dissociated from any pejorative eugenic connotations inappropriate to the entirely positive cross-cultural sense in which I apply it.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo traces the genius of the West Indies to proximity with the sea: "The Caribbean is the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double-folds, of fluidity and sinuosity." (*The Repeating Island*, p. 11) He points out how the "repressive and fallacious machine" holding Western Thought in a "diachronic repetition on an ancient polemic" (Plato v. Aristotle) has eclipsed the "glowing constellation of ideas" provided by the Pre-Socratics, the Sophists and the Gnostics.

<sup>5</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 6

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>7</sup> The Gnostic premise of the poem, and the symbolic grounding by which the protagonists and writer are linked by their craft, is thus obvious from the outset.

<sup>8</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 8

<sup>9</sup> See p. 36.



crossing the cloud-surf, a small thing, far from its home,  
confused by the waves of blue hills.<sup>10</sup>

The multiple significance of the image of the swift is made clear through the poem. It is the sign of Christianity, but also the stitching of opposites, the crossing-point of cultures, the connection between sea and land, the intersection of the imagination with perception, the healing suture.

It is on the beach, too, that Helen, proud and beautiful, with her sandals dangling from one hand, walks up to some drifting smoke:

Change burns at the beach's end. She has to decide  
to enter the smoke or to skirt it. In that pause  
that divides the smoke with a sword, white Helen died;

in that space between the lines of two lifted oars,  
her shadow ambles, filly of Menelaus,  
while black piglets root the midden of Gros Îlet,

but smoke leaves no signature on its page of sand.  
"Yesterday, all my troubles seem so far away,"  
she croons, her clear plastic sandals swung by one hand.<sup>11</sup>

The curling smoke, the unpredictable breath of story, was the way by which the shaman could leave his body to enter the trance of imagination,<sup>12</sup> and behind Helen a horse thunders away through the shallows, hardening to wood to breach the impregnable defences of an invisible city.<sup>13</sup> Helen is threatened and wounded by time. The song 'Yesterday' is an iconic echo of Lydia's anguished plea in *Dimetos*, "Why is nothing forever?"<sup>14</sup> By going through that door into the smoke, Helen opens herself to multiple meanings,<sup>15</sup> to Walcott's epic of the fishermen Achille and Hector, and also to the gaze of Major Plunkett, who uses his infatuation for her to allegorize the rivalry between Britain and France for the 'Helen of the

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<sup>10</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 6

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34

<sup>12</sup> See Eliade, *Shamanism*, *passim*, but particularly pp 260-66, where the sky-journey available through the shamanic trance is discussed, a 'flue' for smoke (p. 490) which might or might not be intoxicating, e.g. hemp smoke (399ff.); Caribbean shamans also used tobacco (p. 131). Note also the similarity between ascents of trees and poles and the ladder of the Mithraic mysteries, by which a planetary journey in trance is possible; this in turn recalls the celestial magic of Ficino and the macrocosmic ideas of Fludd. Such, at least, is the interpretation of Fludd which emerges from Steiner, *Makrokosmos und Mikrokosmos*, pp. 60-84

<sup>13</sup> The horse, too, has Shamanic significance according to Eliade (*Shamanism*, p. 380, pp. 467-70). Shamans from diverse cultures used wooden 'hobby-horses' in ritual dance. The hobby-horse, as part of the 'mummers' tradition which found its way into Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, can still be seen in Morris dances and folk plays. The significance of the horse in *Dimetos* is discussed in a previous chapter.

<sup>14</sup> Fugard, *Dimetos*, p. 35

<sup>15</sup> She indeed *becomes* the horse of the imagination, the *filly*.



West Indies' (St Lucia),<sup>16</sup> and oppose the masculine history of imperialist conquest with 'her story':

Helen needed a history,  
that was the pity that Plunkett felt towards her.  
Not his, but her story. Not theirs, but Helen's war.

[ ... ]        Her village was Troy,  
its smoke obscuring soldiers fallen in battle.  
Then her clouding face, her breasts were its Pitons,

the palms' rusted lances swirled in the death-rattle  
of the gargling shoal; for her Gaul and Briton  
had mounted fort and redoubt, the ruined barracks

with its bushy tunnel and its penile cannon;  
for her cedars fell in green sunrise to the axe.  
His mind drifted with the smoke of his reverie

out to the channel.<sup>17</sup>

The ramifications of this metonymic tour-de-force extend through the book in a richly-woven texture of synchronicity and analogy, using pun, rhyme, rhythm, simile and metaphor to associate the discrete and discover patterns of relatedness reminiscent of the alchemical and magical texts of Hermetic tradition.

But the poet sees Helen too 'as she is' on the beach with a tourist stall. Yet he does not dare to speak to her. Their relationships on that level are inevitably restricted. The surface tension of different lives keeps them apart, while her eyes like Rilke's caged panther in the Jardin des Plantes<sup>18</sup> spark further metaphors and comparisons to weave her in again intimately with the sources of archetype in his own imagination. Helen is a 'real' person, the subject of several watercolour portraits by Walcott,<sup>19</sup> but also and simultaneously her multiple allegories. She is not just an imitation or shadow of a figure from Greek mythology; this is why 'white Helen' dies when this black Helen enters the smoke door. The Homeric Helen can be just as easily said to borrow her features from her Caribbean counterpart. Carol Dougherty writes:

Poetic influence flows both ways; all poetic worlds are reversible. *Omeros* certainly belongs to an epic tradition defined in large part by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but Walcott's poem supplements and reshapes that tradition in turn, helping us to learn "to read Homer" again [...] and from now on I will always hear the sounds of two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman's shop amidst the dust and din of the Trojan War.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> There are interesting parallels between this project and the multiple allegories of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

<sup>17</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 31

<sup>18</sup> 'Der Panther' in Rilke, *Neue Gedichte*

<sup>19</sup> See the illustrations in Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed*, pp. 50 & 68

<sup>20</sup> Dougherty, 'Homer after Omeros' in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (2), 1997, pp. 355f.



Thus, within the tradition, by the power of story, time is reversed and the tradition remade, revaluing both its terms. In this sense Walcott's book *is* epic, in the sense Wilson Harris describes as 'numinous arrival':

Epic is an *arrival* in an architecture of space that is *original* to our age, an *arrival* in multi-dimensionality that alerts us to some kind of transfiguration of appearances — in parallel with science and architecture — that implies energies akin to extra-human faculties inserted into the fabric of history.

I say 'arrival in' to make a distinction from academic *descriptions* of epic as something that belongs to the past and is now a museum-text to be imitated in the theatre or in performances of virtuosity...<sup>21</sup>

By this alchemical process Helen ceases to be bound to one time or context, but can become the whore and spirit of divine wisdom who accompanied Simon Magus, and the vision of Faust's soul, his perilous muse.<sup>22</sup> The informing imagination by which she is created, an amalgam of the poetic personae employed by Walcott, is thus himself Faust. Walcott has said as much; in the interview 'Reflections on *Omeros*' he explains:

There are perhaps two iconic emblems that remain. One of them is, of course, somebody shouting at God [ ... ]. This is the source of all rebellious figures, so that in essence the defiance of God, of saying to God, "Screw you, I don't take orders from anybody, I am X or Y," begins with Lucifer, continues through Prometheus, through Daedalus, through Faust, through any number of figures who reject God's authority.<sup>23</sup>

This Gnostic Anthropos is coupled with:

the Most Beautiful Woman in the World: Helen. That's indestructible, iconic, permanent for all cultures that share this part of history. The other emblem, of course, is the moving sail, alone on the ocean, not a ship but something small on a large expanse of water, trying to get somewhere — the image of the wanderer (call him Odysseus) made emblematic by the great poet.<sup>24</sup>

The wandering Odysseus, the shaman, the trickster Mercurius, gives the power to represent and express by which the poem comes into existence, and is thus 'Seven Seas' himself, and the sea is the medium of his discoveries.<sup>25</sup> It is not the logic of single vision that can make Caliban Prospero's equal or heal his pain but some deeper and older magic. The paradox of the relationship between the real and the imaginary and the unhealed wounds caused by time cannot be solved by a logic dependent on the conscious mind. Walcott

<sup>21</sup> Harris, 'Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition' in *Selected Essays*, p. 187 (author's emphases)

<sup>22</sup> It is surely significant that Walcott opens his poem not with an echo of Homer or Joyce, but an extended allusion to Marlowe's "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?"

<sup>23</sup> Walcott 'Reflections on *Omeros*' in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (2), 1997, p. 235

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 235f.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Baugh talks about Walcott's "ongoing fiction of himself" in connection with Shabine who "sang to you from the depths of the sea" in 'The Schooner Flight'. (Baugh, 'The Poet's Fiction of Self: "The Schooner Flight"', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (2), 1997, pp. 311-19



approached this question programmatically in a memorable address delivered in Jamaica in 1988 entitled 'Caligula's Horse'. He begins by showing that the poetic imagination depends not on the logic of reason but on apparent coincidence. One of W. H. Auden's lines, "and the poets have names for the sea" had returned in the proof copy as "and the ports have names for the sea".<sup>26</sup> Recognizing the superiority of the typographer's error, Auden kept that version, and thus "made a line of verse that makes another poet gasp with delight."<sup>27</sup>

As a manifesto statement of the nature of the poetic imagination this is immensely significant. It is a process which is fundamentally beyond logic, dependent on apparent coincidence, on tricks of orthography and phonetics like rhyme, on the rhythms the ear shares with the eye. The patterning of poetry is, it goes without saying, of a different order from the logic of conscious communication of an intentional message. It may appear not to 'make sense', but the business of making sense, Walcott says, "of saying what one means, is the occupation of tyrants."<sup>28</sup>

Walcott's next point is less straightforward. He says that poetic thought involves two margins. "To think in two margins — one on the right, and one on the left, obviously, is to serve a life-long sentence. To live out a pun."<sup>29</sup> Walcott means, of course, that a line of poetry always contains an innate sense of its necessary length, whether established by rhyme or metre or the flexible frame of a speech rhythm. Beyond that he quotes Dylan Thomas in believing that writing with two margins is: "statements made on the way to the grave".<sup>30</sup> Though poetry is a charm against time and can move beyond things as they are, it does not abolish reality. The poet, unlike the dictator or the emperor, knows that he or she is not immortal. Poetry has this Heideggerian illumination of living towards death. He also means left and right in a punning political sense. Those who write from one margin only and try to take possession of all discourse from that position seek to inscribe their way across all opposition to the establishment of a lie, because such language lacks the self-contradiction and ignorance that, as a matter of experience, must be included in telling the truth. Writing

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<sup>26</sup> From the poem 'Journey to Iceland'

<sup>27</sup> Walcott, 'Caligula's Horse' in Slemon and Tiffin (eds.), *After Europe*, pp. 138f.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 139.



from one margin, Walcott points out, "reduces cities to rubble and incinerates generations who mistake the margins".<sup>31</sup>

In the context of *Omeros* a further sense of margin is relevant. For the inscription from a single margin mistaken for an imperial centre which has degraded and denigrated the Other into a peripheral mimic has been the bane of expanding societies from Greece and Rome to the technocratic, commercial and ideological empires of the recent past. Seeing both societies as marginal poles, as the beginning and coeval end of a linking poetic line, allows a quite different sense of dialogue which transcends an oppositional dialectic. It also allows one to remember that the Other, from *The Tempest* onwards, has always been intimately connected with the Other in one's own self.

Awareness of both margins, Walcott says, means awareness of self-contradiction. The simultaneous validity of opposites is the condition of chaos and disorder that marks the cosmos at the start of the creation story. For this reason Walcott maintains that "the subject of poets, and critics, is not literature but God, or the gods", that "the source of that subject is chaos, ignorance, and its emblem is... *Dominus illuminatio mea*, Lord, who art the light of my life"<sup>32</sup> — that is, a light from some more profound Other coming from what one had not consciously intended to write but which, then, makes such revelatory sense that the poet learns as much from the writing as the reader does, and the question of intention experiences a fundamental shift.

Walcott's criticism of one-margin writing culminates in a critique of contemporary theoretical and critical discourse; he delivers a concentrated blast against what has come to be known as 'Theory', culminating:

I cannot think because I refuse to, unlike Descartes. I have always put Descartes *behind* the horse, and the horse is Pegasus - not the hotel I am staying in at the moment, but the other Pegasus, the one with wings.<sup>33</sup>

The lovely Caribbean calypso pun pokes effective fun at 'massa's' solemnity. But it also makes a serious point. Walcott draws a clear distinction between what he calls 'thinking', which he associates with Descartes and the 'fishmongers' of the Academy, and the flying horse of the poetic imagination.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 141.



Ironically enough, it is one of the founders of the French school of critical theory who provides a clue to Walcott's alternative to the kind of thinking he sees in Descartes. One of the extraordinary works by which Michel Foucault came to prominence was his survey *Les Mots et les Choses*, translated into English as *The Order of Things*, which could also be described as a book about thinking.<sup>34</sup> He is not interested in what is known, but in the parameters of how it is known - the assumptions by which we make the world part of consciousness. The first condition of consciousness is the ability to perceive order in apparent primal chaos, and that order needs to be based on a system of classification. Foucault's answer is the episteme, the framework distinguishable at an archaeological period by which knowledge can be ordered. Taking as a pivotal point the end of the sixteenth century, contemporary with the Faust legend, Foucault characterizes the preceding era as one based on the idea of *resemblance*.<sup>35</sup> Relations throughout the universe could be defined in terms of likeness and analogy. Foucault distinguishes four types of similitude: *convenientia*, *aemulatio*, analogy, and sympathy. *Convenientia* provides the congruence of surface by which symbiotic relationships are made possible, allowing similarities of syntax in the world which is sometimes referred to as the 'Great Chain of Being' stretching from God to inanimate material. *Aemulatio* operates at a distance, so that, for example, the human eye can emulate the light of the sun. Everything is twinned, so that the flowers on the earth emulate the stars sown over the night sky. The links of emulation, like mirror images, do not form a chain but are more like concentric circles reflecting and rivalling each other. Analogy extends beyond visible resemblances, linking all the parts of the universe upwards and downwards, all these links coming together in the human being. This is the foundation of the idea of the human being as the microcosm. Sympathy links the qualities inherent in things by which the power of one can influence another, either directly or as a string can vibrate sympathetically under the influence of acoustic oscillations if the same note or its harmonic are sounded.

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<sup>34</sup> See also an illuminating discussion of this work in Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic*, pp. 52-59. Tomlinson's book is especially valuable for its survey of the role of music in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition from Ficino to Monteverdi, an aspect I have had to neglect.

<sup>35</sup> See Ch 4.



What brings all the linkages between things to consciousness is signature. Each thing bears one sign in itself by which its similarity with other things may be marked, but these signatures themselves are resemblances. "The signature and what it describes are of exactly the same nature."<sup>36</sup> Foucault writes:

To search for a meaning is to bring to light a resemblance. To search for the law governing signs is to discover the things that are alike. The grammar of things is an exegesis of these things. And what the language they speak has to tell us is quite simply what the syntax is that binds them together.<sup>37</sup>

So language itself is also an integral part of the web of similitudes and in cabalistic or magical form is able to interpenetrate with and influence all the chain of existence from the divine to the material.<sup>38</sup> It will be seen here how Foucault is echoing Fludd's ideas on the macrocosm and microcosm, and how the sense of that giving a special power through language is related to Cabala and the ideas put forward by Reuchlin and Trithemius, which later resurfaced in Böhme. Foucault talks about "the figuration of the world redeeming itself, lending its ear at last to the true word."<sup>39</sup>

Mephistopheles persuades Faustus to sell his soul to Lucifer for control of the material world, mistaking the beauty of Helen for that of his own soul. After Faustus, knowledge is gradually arranged differently. Similitude and analogy are no longer the connecting forms of knowledge, but the sources of error and superstition; with Kepler cause, effect and measurement replace the macrocosmic concentricity of Fludd, and as Foucault points out, Descartes substitutes for similitude the binary distinction of identity and difference. Whereas before, the world A was linked through the signatures B to language C in a chain of analogy and similitude, now we are left with a system of representation where A represents C, and the connection between them can become arbitrary. This allows a sign system which can be founded on the laws of logic and cause and effect, which permits a material and mechanistic framework of analysis to be built up, dividing complex forms into minimal units, measuring, calculating, and thus learning to control the material universe. Descartes makes the Newtonian universe possible.

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<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> See p. 211 (previous chapter)

<sup>39</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 37



Now, although the Renaissance had traditionally organized its systems of similitude hierarchically, stretching from God through to inanimate matter, there were in fact two privileged points, God as the head of the chain, and the human being as the microcosm where the strands met. One might compare this with the tonic and dominant in music. Within the chain, however, no one element was privileged over another, as one could not say which term of the comparison depended upon which. By contrast, the new post-Renaissance episteme (which Foucault calls Classical) privileges material reality as that which is to be represented by language and thought.

Foucault sees two types of person emerging who cannot accept the split. One is the madman, by which I mean not so much a clinical condition as a literary trope: the madman is one who is "alienated in analogy. He is the disordered player of the Same and the Other. He takes things for what they are not, and people one for another." The other type is the poet, who "beneath the named, constantly expected differences, rediscovers the buried kinship between things, their scattered resemblances."<sup>40</sup> Neither accepts the tyranny of *on kai me on*.

So when Walcott claims "I cannot think because I refuse to" he seems to be claiming the inheritance of this earlier mode of thought, but with the self-confidence of one who has rejected the empire of logic because he can see it for what it is. Walcott's project instead is one of connection, and the classic poetic tool of connection is metonymy. And yet even such a connection is not unproblematic. In the interview quoted earlier, Walcott takes issue with those who see in *Omeros* mere mimicry: "a reinvention of the *Odyssey*, but this time in the Caribbean,"<sup>41</sup> as though the Caribbean could only achieve dignity by comparison with the Aegean, making the poet a second-hand Homer. This is the danger of what Walcott calls 'stupid historicism', by which achievement always tends to irreversible entropic decay. By this he is answering the charge that in *Omeros* he himself has succumbed to the Muse of History. For this reason he denies an epic intention, pointing to the structure of his own poem:

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 49. Walcott writes in 'Another Life': "My hands, like those of a madman's, / cannot be tied. I have no friends / but the oldest, words." *Collected Poems 1948-84*, pp. 266f.

<sup>41</sup> Walcott 'Reflections on *Omeros*' in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (2), 1997, p. 232



If you look (if you take the trouble to look) at *Omeros*, you will see that the last third of it is a total refutation of the efforts made by two characters [ Plunkett and the poet / narrator]. [ ... ] But nobody looks at the point where my book pivots on itself and accuses itself of vanity, of the vanity of poetry, of the vanity of the narrator. There's a pivotal section that says: Why make an epic of two fishermen quarreling in a rum shop? Why do you have to make this so grand that you turn it into Hector and Achilles talking about Helen of Troy? Why do you need that? Why can't they just be two fishermen quarreling in a rum shop?<sup>42</sup>

This denial appears to imply a rejection of metaphor and the rhymes and connections of coincidence:

Plunkett, in his innocence,  
had tried to change History to a metaphor,  
in the name of a housemaid; I, in self-defence,  
altered her opposite. Yet it was all for her.  
  
Except we had used two opposing strategems  
in praise of her and the island; cannonballs rolled  
in the fort grass were not from Olympian games,  
  
nor the wine-bottle, crusted with its fool's gold,  
from the sunken Ville de Paris, legendary  
emblems; nor all their names the forced coincidence  
  
we had made them.<sup>43</sup>

Gregson Davis asserts that such a 'disavowal of epic' is a traditional gesture with a pedigree reaching back to Ovid and beyond, and by it, Davis maintains, "Walcott reveals that he is not actually renouncing 'epic' so much as redefining it and, in the process, demonstrating the fundamental fluidity of the whole concept of genre,"<sup>44</sup> which would be appropriate in achieving the kind of 'numinous arrival' Harris describes above.

Walcott's rejection of the simple concept of metaphor, in which one thing stands for another, extends to the mistaken use of the imagination, the shamanic trance, to create an alternative poetic world which is then seen as *more* real than the perceivable one. In this the 'Ghost Dance' section of *Omeros* becomes unexpectedly significant. But first let us recapitulate and look more closely at the structure of the work as a whole. Books 1 and 2 had concentrated on the two 'Homeric' projects, the poet / narrator's tale of two fishermen fighting over Helen, observed by Philoctete, blind Seven Seas and the owner of the NO PAIN cafe, Ma Kilman. Interwoven with this story is Dennis Plunkett's attempt to redescribe history for the sake of Helen. Both of these stories centre on wounds, and the wounds seek a cure.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 232f.

<sup>43</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 270f.



Philoctete's wound is first shown as a scar, but how it was cured is not revealed to the tourists:

"It have some things" — he smiles — "worth more than a dollar,"<sup>45</sup>

though its story is said to be told freely by the waterfalls and streams following the course of the craft to the sea (i.e. in the course of the poem). As a wound it was indeed worth more than a 'doulour',<sup>46</sup> it is pain and blessing (punning on the French blessé): "I am blest wif this wound."<sup>47</sup> Recording the search for its cure will be a central concern of the book, for indeed the wound itself seeks to speak. Puckered like a sea-urchin or a conch, tingling like the tendrils of an anemone, it is described as "the mouth of a sore",<sup>48</sup> which Philoctete recognizes as the wordless wound of the Middle Passage:

He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles  
of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?<sup>49</sup>

In the shape in which it is first presented, as a scar, it provides an important clue to that absent presence of the wanderer Odysseus, for it was by an ancient scar that Odysseus, master of disguise, feared he might be recognized by his old nurse Eurycleia.<sup>50</sup> Philoctetes' wound, according to Sophocles, was caused by his accidentally stumbling into the precinct of a goddess and being bitten by a snake, themes redolent of Gnostic mythology. In addition, both Dougherty and Ramazani point to parallels between Philoctete and Caliban:<sup>51</sup> "Both Caliban and Philoctete are seized with pain and anger, lament their compulsory hard labor, and personify colonial grievance."<sup>52</sup> His curses, like Caliban's, are punished by 'stinging pinches':

*When cutlass cut smoke, when cocks surprise their arseholes*

*by shitting eggs, he cursed, black people go get rest  
from God; at which point a fierce cluster of arrows*

<sup>44</sup> Davis, 'Disavowal of Epic' in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (2), 1997, p. 328

<sup>45</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 4

<sup>46</sup> c.f. the pun in *The Tempest*, II.1.18f, in which Gonzalo turns the dollar wager into doulour.

<sup>47</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 18

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 18

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>50</sup> Dougherty, 'Homer after *Omeros*' in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (2), 1997, pp. 341

<sup>51</sup> Ramazani notes: "Walcott paradoxically refreshes the symbol of postcolonial agony, deindigenizing Caliban and fusing him with a still-more-wizened prototype. Exemplifying the twists and turns of intercultural inheritance, this manoeuvre belies the narrative of postcolonial literary development as a progression from alien metropolitan influence to complete incorporation within the native cultural body. In *Omeros* the culturally alien and the native, the outside and the inside stage a polyrhythmic dance." Ramazani, 'The Wound of History' in *PMLA* 112/13, 1998, pp. 409f.

<sup>52</sup> Ramazani, 'The Wound of History' in *PMLA* 112/13, 1998, p. 409



targeted the sore, and he screamed in the yam rows.<sup>53</sup>

Caliban only wishes to use the language he has been taught in order to curse. Philoctete must discover how the curse can be transmuted into a blessing.

Caliban, it was pointed out in Ch 3, as Prospero's shadow and 'son', shares Prospero's nature and inheritance. Philoctete's leg wound, the suffering of the Africans brought to slavery in the Caribbean, is congruent with Plunkett's head wound, got in the North African desert in defence of the Empire which would shortly dissolve, "the flags pinned to a map", in spite of "the class war that denigrated the dead",<sup>54</sup> degrading much of the population of England just like their colonial subjects. Walcott comments:

This wound I have stitched into Plunkett's character.  
He has to be wounded, affliction is one theme  
of this work, this fiction, since every "I" is a  
fiction finally.<sup>55</sup>

Plunkett, too, is wounded by Helen. Not only his historical research but everything he does is illumined and obsessively loaded with her yellow dress, the velvet V of her nape, and the "smile that made a drama out of every passing".<sup>56</sup> Though she is his inspiration, he is aware that his obsession is also a betrayal of his wife. The climax of his research, the discovery of a Midshipman Plunkett who died in the Battle of the Saints, a surrogate for the child he could never have with Maud, is ambivalently fathered on Helen, a fiction on a fiction:

The breakers had threshed her name with the very sound  
the midshipman heard. He had given her a son.<sup>57</sup>

Plunkett, isolated on his pig-farm, is a very similar figure to Dimetos, his imperial project rusting in the vegetation like the great wheels which Messrs Bennett and Ward have left in the Malebolge above Soufrière, all that remains of plans for "an alchemy that could turn sulphur / gold".<sup>58</sup> He too has been lured to a fall by lust for Helen's unreachable beauty, a lust hopelessly compromised by the power-relations implied by the yellow dress: "that dress / had an empire's tag on it, mistress to slave"<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 21

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64



Book 3 begins with Achille's arrival in Africa in search of his name, lured in trance by the swift, the shamanic bird who can 'touch both worlds with her rainbow' and whose 'speed outdarted memory'. Though he learns the name of his father, Afolabe, and recognizes the origins of much of Caribbean culture, it is no Rastafarian apotheosis. He witnesses instead the enslavement of his father's people by other Africans; he learns that for him names have been separated from meanings; his desire for revenge is a fratricidal dead end. He returns through knowledge of the Middle Passage, through the history of the Caribbean's scattered peoples from shredded treaties and the coming of Sephardic Jews,<sup>60</sup> Wilberforce, the Port Royal Earthquake, to the arrival of indentured Indians on *the Fatel Rozack*. The wounds are not healed. Plunkett, conflated with the poetic 'I', dreams that he has become a pig, rooting in Circe's body.<sup>61</sup>

In Book 4, the darkest part of the poem, the Ghost Dance is featured.<sup>62</sup> While what we have said so far about the Faustian fall and the advent of the Newtonian universe has concentrated on a fascination with the one-sided projection of the material involving a Cartesian split, there is also a danger, which we have observed in the heirs of the Romantic movement, of the creation of an illusory world entirely separated from the 'real'. This would be to believe the power of one's imagination could exempt one from the laws of cause and effect applying to the 'real' world while one is wholly within that world, the equivalent of stepping outside Prof. Sokal's apartment window. The Ghost Dance, an expression of a millennial movement based on the prophecies of the shaman Wovoka, who 'died' and returned to preach the renewal of the ancestral world among the Sioux between 1887 and 1889, was the final disaster for Native Americans driven northwards and westwards by land-hungry white settlers who believed in 'Manifest Destiny' and Bishop Berkeley's dictum

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<sup>60</sup> Sephardic Jews emigrated to the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, from the early 17th century. In 1848, according to Bisnauth, eight of the 47 members of the Jamaican House of Assembly were Jews. For a history of the Jews in the Caribbean, see Bisnauth, *History of Religions in the Caribbean*, pp. 69-77.

<sup>61</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 155. Fugard, perhaps in a mood of brutal disillusionment after *Dimetos*, includes a parodic reference to Dimetos' story about a man dreaming he is a horse in *A Place with the Pigs*. Pavel says, "Help me! I'll tell you a story, Pavel. Are you listening? Once upon a time, in a small village, there was a very very stupid man who woke up one morning and decided that he wanted to be a pig. Oh shut up! Don't you want to hear the rest of it? It's got a very funny ending, Pavel. His feet turn into trotters, his nose becomes a snout..." Fugard, *Plays I*, p. 141

<sup>62</sup> The Ghost Dance as a phenomenon interested Walcott enough to write a play about it in 1989 before reworking the theme in *Omeros*. Hamner lists the comments of various critics who fail to see the reason for including these incidents. Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed*, pp. 92-99



'Westward the Course of Empire takes its Way'. Native Americans were driven out of Georgia in the early 19th century on the so-called 'Trail of Tears' to make way for further slave plantations, and contingents from the Caribbean, the so-called 'buffalo soldiers' referred to in Bob Marley's song, were involved in the 'pacification' of the Plains Indians through the rest of the century. Walcott alludes to all these events.

Wovoka, the chief initiator of the Ghost Dance, was the son of a shaman brought up by a white rancher. He prophesied that the whites would be destroyed by a great flood. Though he did not preach war against the whites, his movement provoked a government decision to suppress the Ghost Dance, leading to the massacre at Wounded Knee. Many of the Ghost Dancers wore special shirts which they were convinced would make them invulnerable. This was not the case.

The Ghost Dance recalls other uprisings and slave revolts in the Caribbean in which shamans played leading roles, often promising invulnerability through obeah or *orisha* powers. The best known of these is perhaps Boukman, who on a stormy night in August 1791 used *vodun* ceremonies to initiate a slave rebellion in Haiti which was eventually to result in Haitian independence.<sup>63</sup> Many of the slaves who stormed the French cannon were convinced of their invulnerability through magic powers, or that if they were killed they would wake up again in Africa.<sup>64</sup>

In the Ghost Dance section another wounded persona enters the book. Catherine Weldon suffers from "the wound of her son's / death from a rusty nail".<sup>65</sup> Weldon was a historical personage who went west from Brooklyn in 1889 and became a close associate of Chief Sitting Bull, translating various works of European literature into the Sioux language including stories of the Trojan War. She was a witness to the Ghost Dance uprising, and though she opposed it, her friendship with the Indians caused her to be exiled by the government to the Parkins' farm, where she remained, disillusioned with her own people and estranged from the Indians. During the 1890 violence her son Christie stepped on a

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<sup>63</sup> C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 87

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 87

<sup>65</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 176



rusty nail and the boy subsequently died of a tetanus infection.<sup>66</sup> Her voice becomes assimilated to that of the poet / narrator, like Plunkett's. Walcott writes:

When one grief afflicts us we choose a sharper grief  
in hope that enormity will ease affliction,  
so Catherine Weldon rose in high relief

through the thin page of a cloud, making a fiction  
of my own loss. I was searching for characters,  
and in her shawled voice I heard the snow that would be blown

when the wind covered the tracks of the Dakotas,  
the Sioux, and the Crows, my sorrow had been replaced<sup>67</sup>

Walcott also elides the Brooklyn that Weldon comes from with Brookline, Massachusetts, where Walcott himself lives. At this pivotal point in the poem the fluid hexameter of the *terza rima* gives way to a very different rhythm of rhymed couplets, marking the passage out as a core section. Not Helen but another girl has here inflicted a wound which joins the 'tonic' in the chord of affliction throughout the book:

House of umbrage, house of fear,  
house of multiplying air

This house is both body:

House that creaks, age fifty-seven,

and mind:

Unlucky house that I uncurse  
by rites of genuflecting verse<sup>68</sup>

whose final redemption can only be in poetry and pity. Is it fanciful to hear in that rhythm, those couplets, an echo of Prospero's envoi, bereft of Ariel: "as you from crimes would pardoned be / Let your indulgence set me free"?<sup>69</sup>

In Book 6 the poem wheels through Europe from its outer edge in Portugal to London, Ireland, the Mediterranean. As the poet crosses a meridian, so the linear motion of time is disrupted, as is immediately made clear in references to an hourglass, a church clock, Sunday's watch, a pendulum, and the Greenwich meridian.<sup>70</sup> His meditation on time,

<sup>66</sup> Susan Stewart, Letter in *PMLA*, 113/1, 1998, p.130

<sup>67</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 181

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 173

<sup>69</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Epilogue

<sup>70</sup> In the London section of the poem there is one surprising error. To illustrate the arrogance of London's imperial architecture and petrified institutions, the poet shows a down-and-out Omeros, clutching a manuscript, being turned off the steps of the church by 'a raging sparrow' of a churchwarden. Ironically, Walcott has chosen the one building, St Martin-in-the-Fields, where the homeless are made welcome and not



allowing it to run backwards and forwards, also undermines other certainties: the claim of power to determine standards and values. Maud Plunkett's native Ireland, Britain's first colony, may only show ruins of its native culture by the tea-van and tourist sweaters of Glendalough, but, though split by a murderous fratricide like Greek and Trojan, it gave birth to the first postcolonial literature and the namesake of Walcott's wanderer. From a trip through the harbours where the original Greek epic arose, Walcott arcs into the destiny of European civilization at Auschwitz. Art was unable to redeem these cities from "the terror of Time"<sup>71</sup> When the book returns to America, it is to the death of the Sioux. Wovoka's prophecy has been fulfilled, but with Pythian irony: the flood has come in the form of snow, and "whiteness is everywhere".<sup>72</sup> The poet, meanwhile, is left unable to find the sculptor's studio where the inspiration for his poem originated.

It is only in Book 7 that the wounds are healed, but not before Hector's death. He has exchanged his 'craft' for his Comet transport, painted with flames that remind the old island women of hell,<sup>73</sup> bringing tourists to a changing island which is trying to move forward in the urban-technological race.

He's paid the penalty of giving up the sea  
as graceless and as treacherous as it had seemed,  
for the taxi-business; he was making money.<sup>74</sup>

but the loss of Helen is a "wound that speed alone could not heal"<sup>75</sup> and, like Faustus, he plunges down to his death in his own 'hell'; Walcott's 'filmscript' at this point dwells on the imagery of horses, the flying and the falling.<sup>76</sup>

It was Paracelsus and his followers who rediscovered an old Germanic principle of folk medicine, homeopathy — that like cures like — initiating the practice of using distillates of poisons to effect their cure. Following the correspondence of the microcosm and macrocosm, such remedial herbs were usually characterized by the four principles outlined by Foucault as emulation, convenience, analogy and sympathy, and following the doctrine of signatures they bore some sign which, as if by coincidence, marked them out for their

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turned away. Here the synchronicity of the poem seems to be working against him to reveal that his rage against the colonist is still not completely quenched.

<sup>71</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 204

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118



purpose. The plant which Ma Kilman uses to cure Philoctete's wound is exactly of this type. Grown from a seed brought from Africa centuries ago by a swift, in emulation of the slaves, it grows in a convenient place among the mosses at the roots of the cedars that can be made into boats ('craft') in the wide gulf of the Caribbean that echoes the Bight of Benin.<sup>77</sup> It has a gangrenous smell, poisoning from its bitter root, by analogy with slavery, and bears the anchor shape of Philoctete's wound. But, collected with devotion and prepared as a baptismal infusion in which Philoctete bathes his leg, its sympathetic virtues heal the wound to a harmless scar that tourists may gawp at but whose speech is the island itself.

When Walcott describes Ma Kilman as an obeah-woman, he is following a widespread but not entirely accurate use of the term.<sup>78</sup> Obeah is actually witchcraft used for harmful purposes, and practitioners of obeah with its proximity to death and dark forces are still regarded with fear in the Caribbean, although accurate information about them is hard to find. The tradition of obeah can certainly be traced back to African witchcraft, but perhaps not exclusively so. According to Williams, obeah was first mentioned in print in the 1760 Acts of the Jamaica Assembly, of which No. 24 was: "To remedy the Evils arising from irregular Assemblies of Slaves, preventing possessing Arms and Ammunition, going from Place to Place without tickets, and for the preventing of Obeah, etc."<sup>79</sup> Williams suggests the word should be derived from the Ashanti *obayifo*, meaning witch,<sup>80</sup> and that witchcraft of this sort was clearly distinguished from the priestly magic of the *okomfo*, or shaman. Slave owners were, however, not always aware of the difference between the *okomfo* who presided over the tribal dances, drumming, and ritual possessions by spirit powers, who

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 230

<sup>77</sup> Walcott here uses the imagery of an arrow: "the reversible Bight / of Benin was her bow, her target the ringed haze / of a circling horizon." (*Omeros*, p. 239) There is an interesting parallel here with the legend of Ladislaus, King of Hungary (1440-57), who prayed that an arrow he shot into the air would guide him to a herb that would relieve the suffering of his plague-stricken people. It landed on a gentian, a plant named after King Gentius of Illyria and known at least since Roman times for its curative and refreshing powers. Gentians grow in particular profusion in Lydia.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of other literary treatments of obeah women, see Collins, "We Shall All Heal": Ma Kilman, the Obeah Woman, as Mother-Healer in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, in *Literature and Medicine*, 14 (1), 1995, pp. 160ff.

<sup>79</sup> Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 57. This and subsequent information is drawn from his book, pp. 50-108. See also Bisnauth, *History of Religions in the Caribbean*, pp. 80-100.

<sup>80</sup> There has also been speculation about an Egyptian derivation of the word, in the sense of snake-charmer or sorcerer (Bell, *Obeah*, p. 6)



was known as 'myal-man', and the obeah man who worked in secret, often in isolation, and operated with curses and poisons.

For a time, it seems, the two traditions merged, and it was the *okomfo* who administered the fetish oath, and smeared the lips of slaves with rum, blood, gunpowder and grave dirt to ensure silence in planning revolts against the planters, providing a powder, too, which he claimed would make them invulnerable. Edward Long, writing in 1774, describes how a potion made of calalu was used to put people into a catatonic stupor from which they were subsequently woken as a proof that the shamans had the power of resurrection. It was at this time that a series of mass poisonings shook the colonial administrations and prompted most Caribbean territories to introduce legislation to suppress obeah and any other expression of African religious fervour.

After Emancipation the two traditions separated again and obeah became a feared and secret art with as firm a place in folk belief as the presence of jumbies near silk-cotton trees or the flying, bloodsucking 'soucouyants' or the unborn, undead 'bolom'. Meanwhile shamanistic trance rituals involving possession by higher powers or ancestor figures developed into the various syncretistic religions and cults, subject to a greater or lesser extent to the influence of Christian denominations. These include *vodun* in Haiti, *santeria* in Cuba, and *candomblé* in Brazil. As did *vodun* in Haiti, Shango in Trinidad conflated elements from Roman Catholicism with *orisha* or 'Africa work', while the Shouters Church exhibited more traits of revivalist Protestantism. Jamaica developed a range of cults from Cumina (the most African) through Pocomania, Bedwardism, Convince and Revival Zion.<sup>81</sup> *Vodun* has lengthy ceremonies involving spirit possession by the *loas*, or powers, who manifest on their *serviteurs* with the characteristics of that power. Legba, for example, the first to be invited, always limps. He is also identified with St Anthony. Other powers of African origin are Ogun (the god of iron and war), Damballa (curer of illnesses) and Shango (god of thunder). Erzilie is said to be Mater Dolorosa, the Virgin Mary. The Trinidadian Shango cult is similar, but at the start of the ceremony Eshu, the trickster Satan, is dismissed before

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<sup>81</sup> See Simpson, *Religious Cults of the Caribbean*, pp. 157-200.



Ogun (St Michael) and other powers manifest themselves.<sup>82</sup> The Jamaican rituals usually use booths made with five upright bamboo poles, four at the corners and one at the centre (which sometimes represents the Holy Ghost). The powers are believed to descend the centre pole and enter the bodies of those they possess through their feet.<sup>83</sup> Simpson describes a residual Chango cult in St Lucia similar to that in Trinidad, but simpler. It is called Kele, apparently the word for small imported beads used by the Yoruba people of Nigeria. It involves possession by the spirits of ancestors, but there is apparently little memory of the names of the African gods.<sup>84</sup>

In spite of the differences between these beliefs and obeah, they have a number of features in common: ritual and incantation, the use of offerings, the importance of ritual objects, and bush baths or herbal infusions. All of them are more or less syncretic, blending rituals from Africa, European religions and folk beliefs, and a number of Amerindian elements. Even obeah is not purely African. Williams reports a case from St Lucia of an obeah murderer who was found to possess a grimoire of purported writings by Albertus Magnus which he had obtained in Haiti.<sup>85</sup> Many descriptions of obeah techniques are remarkably similar to those found in Europe in the Middle Ages and early modern period.<sup>86</sup> Still, it is unnecessary to postulate mutual or common influence if the idea is accepted that a collective unconscious may use similar archetypal means of expression over widely separate times and places.<sup>87</sup> Ma Kilman is certainly using magic. Religion and magic have often been uneasy bedfellows, perhaps not least because religion contains its own appeal to magic, but in the Caribbean their opposition has been less extreme. Hesketh Bell, in a patronizing account of obeah in Grenada first published in 1889 notes "the tenacity with which the West Indian negroes cling to the remnants of the superstitions of their African fathers" and

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<sup>82</sup> Bisnauth, *History of Religions in the Caribbean*, pp. 165-174, and Simpson, *Religious Cults of the Caribbean*, pp. 11-111

<sup>83</sup> Simpson, *Religious Cults of the Caribbean*, pp. 157-200

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 314f. Ma Kilman in *Omeros* has also forgotten the African names. Those that are used in fact come from the *vodun* tradition.

<sup>85</sup> Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, pp. 110-13

<sup>86</sup> See Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, *passim*. Ficino's planetary magic or Dee's angel magic also show interesting parallels.

<sup>87</sup> On the other hand Umberto Eco, in *Foucault's Pendulum*, confidently includes Candomblé in his fanciful treatment of the Gnostic / Hermetic legacy.



suggests that even though the churches were packed, "it is to be feared that a great deal of this outward show of piety and religion is but very superficial..."<sup>88</sup>

Ma Kilman has no qualms about pursuing her cure after leaving Sunday Mass, and when she reaches the plant she seeks she takes off her church dress, wig and hat, whose bead berries allude to Kele, to become in her satin shift "the sybil, the obeah woman" using the power of "the obeah / that possessed her that the priests considered evil / in their white satin frocks",<sup>89</sup> a clear reference to the comparability of their own ambivalent marginal status.

To find the flower Ma Kilman climbs up a steep path until a line of ants leads her to the place where it grows. In doing so she activates a whole series of metonymic connections which mirror the homeopathic principles of emulation, convenience, analogy and sympathy, of which the most striking example is the scene in which the poet visits his birthplace, now a printery, and in a vision talks to his dead father, Warwick, who explains his Shakespearean inheritance, down to the coincidence of the date of his death (23 April). Together they walk to the harbour where they see a huge white ship. The immaculate European cruise liner appears to mock the tin roofs of the colonial town it dwarfs:

From here, in his boyhood, he had seen women climb  
like ants up a white flower-pot, baskets of coal  
balanced on their torchoned heads, without touching them,<sup>90</sup>

All day they climbed up the anthracite hills as in some Dantesque inferno loading the coal on to the white liner at a penny a hundredweight load. To convert the dross to true flight, working a sympathetic magic that can make a difference to the 'real' world,<sup>91</sup> the poet's father gives him this charge:

"Because Rhyme remains the parentheses of palms  
shielding a candle's tongue, it is the language's  
desire to hold the loved world in its arms;

or heft a coal-basket; only by its stages  
like those groaning women will you achieve that height  
whose wooden planks in couplets lift your pages

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<sup>88</sup> Bell, *Obeah*, p. 42. The style of this book, though critical of Froude, shows a very typical eurocentric attitude of amused superiority mingled with ignorant fascination. In one place he even allows his fancy to run riot in a 'vision' of a Carib ritual complete with a human sacrifice of a 'hapless Carib maiden'. At the moment the 'ivory dagger' enters her "the lovely maiden's lips part in one long despairing shriek"! (Bell, *Obeah*, p. 92)

<sup>89</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 245

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73

<sup>91</sup> Fred D'Aguiar, in illuminating analyses of 'The Castaway' and 'Another Life' sees as a central concern Walcott's investigation of the realm of the Magus' power, "the relationship between the individual, on the one hand, and his/her ability to act on that environment and change it or remain powerless in it, on the other." ('Adam's Other Garden', *Caribana* 3, 1992-3, p. 69)



higher than those hills of infernal anthracite.  
There, like ants or angels, they see their native town,  
unknown, raw, insignificant. They walk, you write;

keep to that narrow causeway without looking down,  
climbing in their footsteps, that slow, ancestral beat  
of those used to climbing roads; your own work owes them

because the couplet of those multiplying feet  
made your first rhymes. Look, they climb, and no one knows them;  
they take their copper pittances, and your duty

from the time you watched them from your grandmother's house  
as a child wounded by their power and beauty  
is the chance you now have, to give those feet a voice."<sup>92</sup>

The synchronistic connections extend back to the first conversation between Philoctete and Ma Kilman, when in an 'Egyptian' silence she mutters:

"It have a flower somewhere, a medicine, and ways  
my grandmother would boil it. I used to watch ants  
climbing her white flower-pot. But, God, in which place?"<sup>93</sup>

The gods she calls on make their first appearance in the storm, when the thunder roars and "the abrupt Shango drums / made Neptune rock in the caves", "Erzulie / rattling her ra-ra; Ogun, the blacksmith, feeling / No Pain; Damballa winding like a zandoli / lizard".<sup>94</sup> Ma Kilman herself metamorphoses into a mountain: "that turbanned La Sorcière, / the sorceress mountain with a madras kerchief / and flashing spectacles"<sup>95</sup> Later, when the military operation is depicted in which Achille's ancestor is renamed because of his heroic feats of strength, the men hauling the cannon are "black warrior ants".<sup>96</sup> The flower too, conversely, has reseeded itself ever further from the sea and "out of the ocean / it climbed like the ants, the ancestors of Achille, / the women carrying coals",<sup>97</sup> but before Ma Kilman plucks it to use it, she calls on the power and rituals of the old gods whose names she no longer knows, but whose numinosity is real in the stones and sun on the mountain in the world about her, while overhead the bats in the silk-cotton tree "when their wings with crisscrossing stitches / blurred in the leaf-breaks"<sup>98</sup> are the unconscious shadow of the connecting swift. It is the

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<sup>92</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, pp. 75f.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 52

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 58

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 83

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 239

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 243



ecstatic agony of her 'mental strife' that brings the cure: "Philoctete shook himself up from the bed of his grave, / and felt the pain draining"<sup>99</sup> before the physical cure of the bush-bath.

By this profoundly feminine magic<sup>100</sup> stressing the interconnective flux beneath phenomena she can overcome masculine, conquistadorial single vision and restore an Eden in which each thing is purely itself and yet synchronistically linked beyond itself, which the poem, having escaped time, shows to have been there from the beginning. For that is how Walcott has used metaphor all along. Near the beginning of *Omeros*, as the fishermen's day begins, blind Seven Seas is introduced:

Seven Seas rose in the half-dark to make coffee.  
Sunrise was heating the ring of the horizon  
and clouds were rising like loaves. By the heat of the

glowing iron rose he slid the saucepan's base on-  
to the ring and anchored it there. The saucepan shook  
from the weight of water in it, then it settled.<sup>101</sup>

Here the ring being warmed to make coffee is compared with the glow of the sunrise on the Caribbean horizon, but whereas usually a metaphor is constructed so that one term is privileged as the 'real' and the other, however concrete, however much an objective correlative, remains a descriptive image, here in this case both terms are *equally* real. There *is* an electric ring being heated, and there *is* a glowing roseate circle of heat at the horizon. Clouds are rising, as are the loaves in the village bakery, or as Seven Seas himself is rising, or the steam from his saucepan. The saucepan is anchored to the ring as the boats he envies are riding on that sea enclosed by that horizon, while the sea itself is the water in his pan. His boat, as a poet seeing by the light of his imagination, will be his poetic craft (all puns intended), a comparison used again and again for the poet-narrator himself, who is simultaneously in both worlds and in neither and so can see them as 'real' and simultaneously not real:

... there are two journeys  
in every odyssey, one on worried water,

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 245

<sup>100</sup> Loretta Collins stresses the importance of Walcott's "insistence on an incorporation of the 'feminine' in his vision" ("We Shall All Heal", *Literature and Medicine* 14(1), 1995, p. 160). The nature of the roles Ma Kilman, Catherine Weldon, the poet's mother, Maud Plunkett (who is partly conflated with her), and of course Helen play is complemented by the fact that Ma Kilman uses her healing for the benefit of the male characters. The Boxing Day masquerade, (*Omeros*, pp. 272-77), in which Achilles dresses as a woman and Philoctete goes on stilts, carries all the cross-cultural and synergetic implications investigated by Wilson Harris in his essay 'Creoleness' (Harris, *Selected Essays*, pp. 237-47)

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



the other crouched and motionless, without noise.  
For both, the 'I' is a mast; a desk is a raft  
for one, foaming with paper, and dipping the beak

of a pen in its foam, while an actual craft  
carries the other to cities where people speak  
a different language, or look at him differently.<sup>102</sup>

Here too, and if we have once observed it we find it throughout the poem, the same process is continued. Through it, the magical connectedness of everything can be restored, and the people and land of St Lucia shine with a truly epic Homeric glory. So between ancient Greece and the late 20th century the poet is also working within the margins of time as imaginary space, and the verse is what links them.

The cure is not just for Philoctete's wound. Simultaneously the poet, who in the 'real' chthonic world has become a dung-beetle caught in a vicious circle of partners sucking each other dry, "feeling the wrong love", is given the chance of an alchemical transmutation. Suddenly he can see with the clear eyes of the blind seer, St Lucia, and "my joy was pounding like a stallion's hooves".<sup>103</sup> So when Philoctete emerges from the bath it is also as a new Adam:

His ribs thudded like a horse  
cantering on a beach that bursts into full gallop  
[ ... ]            and the water, which he swirled  
like a child, steered his brow into the right current,  
as calm as In God We Troust to that other world,  
and his flexed palm enclosed an oar with the identical closure of a mouth around its own name.<sup>104</sup>

Now he has reached a state where "there would be no need in life for metaphor. Then we would really *see*,"<sup>105</sup> because "lit, we were the light of the world,"<sup>106</sup> the Gnostic divine Anthropos. The wound, *and* its cure, is metaphor. Philoctete / Caliban feels — and the author can create — the Adamic language envisaged in *Another Life*: "Adam's task of giving things their names."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 249

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 247f.

<sup>105</sup> Walcott, 'Reflections on Omeros' in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (2), 1997, p. 233 (author's emphasis)

<sup>106</sup> Walcott, *Another Life*, in *Collected Poems*, p. 294. This is perhaps the sense in which Walcott means "I think poetry can be the beginning of a religion" (Interview with Luigi Sampietro, *Caribana* 3, 1992-3, p. 36)

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 294



The relationship of true vision depends on a numinous interaction with the world through language, as Foucault maintains. It implies that there is one language which, if found, is the key to making the world resonate as it does in *Omeros*.<sup>108</sup> Auden claimed that "poetry makes nothing happen,"<sup>109</sup> but the numinous resonance in language, which we call poetry, sets up, and is set up by, harmonic resonances in the world we perceive. They operate magically, as though by coincidence. The link is not causal but one of meaning, or synchronicity, as tenuous as superstition. The right words, a product of chance and music, hard work and devotion, the ego in co-operation with the unconscious, enter a dance that is not that of language alone. The concept of an innate relationship between a sign in language and its referent, the pre-Cartesian episteme, is the principle behind Rimbaud's 'Alchimie du Verbe', and it echoes Böhme,<sup>110</sup> and before him Reuchlin.<sup>111</sup>

It is only recently that Böhme's linguistic analyses have been taken seriously. Amazingly enough, Günther Bonheim, in his 1989 dissertation on Böhme, referred to Konopacki's *The Descent into Words* of 1979 as a *pioneering* work.<sup>112</sup> Bonheim's explanation for this neglect is highly relevant and worth quoting in detail:

Böhmes Wortanalysen sind vermutlich deshalb insgesamt so wenig beachtet worden, weil man sie schlicht nicht ernst zu nehmen vermochte. Der Gedanke, daß Name und Sache *nichts* miteinander zu tun haben (die gegenteilige Ansicht gehört, W. Kayser zufolge, einer "primitiven, besser mythischen Denkform" (S. 528) an), scheint zu tief verwurzelt zu sein, als daß man für die Spekulationen, die "Spiele und Mätzchen der Lautsymbolik" (Cysarz, S. 17), die "geradezu närrisch anmutende Deutung der Lautwerke eines Wortes" (Borkmann, S. 8) mehr als ein bloß historisches Interesse hätte erübrigen können. In fast allem, was über sie geschrieben wurde, schimmert dementsprechend die Gewißheit durch, die Heller stellvertretend formuliert: Böhmes Lehren sind "durch moderne linguistische Erkenntnisse längst überholt worden" (S. 17). Indes trifft das die Sache nicht so ganz, denn für die moderne Linguistik scheinen die wahren Zusammenhänge derart offen

<sup>108</sup> It is what Eichendorff, summing up the idealism of the German Romantics, refers to in 'Wünschelrute' ('Divining Rod')

Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen,  
Die da träumen fort und fort,  
Und die Welt hebt an zu singen,  
Triffst du nur das Zauberwort.  
(While each thing continues dreaming,  
In that sleep its song's unheard,  
And the earth commences singing  
Should you but find the magic word)

(Eichendorff, *Werke in einem Band*, p. 103 - my translation)

<sup>109</sup> W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats'

<sup>110</sup> Böhme's analysis of language is in the service of a concept of the deification of Man as the Anthropos when fused with the wisdom and vision of eternity given him through the 'Virgin Sophia'; from this his relatedness to the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition becomes clear. (Grunsky, *Jacob Böhme*, pp. 194-204)

<sup>111</sup> See pp. 40-43.

<sup>112</sup> Bonheim, *Zeichendeutung und Natursprache: ein Versuch über Jacob Böhme*, p. 275 - author's emphasis



zutage zu liegen, daß sie sich mit der Frage erst gar nicht mehr auseinandersetzt. Soweit es dessen überhaupt noch bedurfte, gilt das Thema mit dem, was Saussure zur Arbitrarität des Zeichens seinerzeit beiläufig anmerkte, als grundsätzlich erledigt: "Das Band, welches das Bezeichnete mit der Bezeichnung verknüpft, ist beliebig; und da wir unter Zeichen das durch die assoziative Verbindung einer Bezeichnung mit einem Bezeichneten erzeugte Ganze verstehen, so können wir dafür auch einfacher sagen: *das sprachliche Zeichen ist beliebig.*" (S. 79)

(Böhme's linguistic analyses have probably been so widely ignored simply because no one thought to take them seriously. The notion that name and thing have *nothing* to do with one another (the contrary opinion belonging, according to W. Kayser, to a "primitive, or rather mythic conception" (p. 528)) seems to be too deeply rooted for anyone to generate more than historical interest in the speculations, the "games and triflings of sound symbolism" (Cysarz, p. 17), the "frankly foolish seeming interpretation of the phonetic values of a word" (Borkmann, p. 8). So almost everything written about them implies the conviction expressed in an exemplary way by Heller that Böhme's teachings "have been rendered completely outdated by modern linguistics" (p. 17). That, however, is not entirely the case, because modern linguistics seems to regard the true relations as so cut and dried that it has never bothered to consider the question. If there was any residual need, the issue seemed to have been dealt with once and for all by what Saussure once noted in passing about the arbitrary nature of the sign: "The link joining the signifier to the signified is arbitrary; and as we take the sign to be the totality created by the associative connection of a signifier with a signified we can state more simply: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary.*" (p. 79))<sup>113</sup>

In the light of what has been said in the last chapter about the relationship between perception (and the creative imagination) and the 'real world', this arbitrariness ceases to be relevant. The power of language to 'create' the world which we perceive allows instead for each person to set up their own bonds of significance on a phonetic level between the language and what it inscribes. Thus each individual indeed has the Adamic and alchemical power to name,<sup>114</sup> to set up or appreciate the resonances which Walcott creates in *Omeros*.

The genesis of the work, indeed, operates on this phonetic level :

I said, "Omeros,"

and *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was  
both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,  
*os* a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes

and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.  
Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 365 - authors' emphases, my translation)

<sup>114</sup> According to Bonheim, Adam's power to name is for Böhme an extension of divine knowledge of the essence of each thing: "Die vielen Zeichen des Äußeren lassen das Innere durchschimmern und tun auf diese Weise kund, wie der Name als eine weitere Signatur auszusehen hat, damit er sich in die Reihe der bereits vorhandenen harmonisch einfügt und das Wesen des Objekts zum Ausdruck bringt." (The many external signs allow the inner nature to shine through and thus reveal what the name should be as one further signature, so that it is integrated harmoniously in those already there and expresses the nature of the object) (Bonheim, *Zeichendeutung und Natursprache*, p. 254) Adam is able to do this through his intermediary position sharing divine and material nature. Konopacki points out that after the Fall Böhme sees the Flood as setting "the multitude of human languages into action, reducing human communication to fractionated articulations." (Konopacki, *The Descent into Words*, p. 108) A return to Eden such as Walcott envisages necessitates a return to unity through infinite multiplicity, a return to Eden after circling the globe, such as Kleist describes in 'Über das Marionettentheater'. Norman O. Brown makes similar points in *Love's Body* (p. 258): "To hear again the primordial language is to restore to words their full significance."



that echoed from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed.<sup>115</sup>

Here language, broken into phonetic components, metamorphoses through Joycean similitude. Equally, Omeros could be *Om*, syllable of spiritual peace, and *Eros*, the love of material beauty. Or it could be the *Meer-Ross*, the sea-horse, whose thundering hooves accompany the vision of Helen on the beach and Philoctete's cure. "I have always put Descartes *behind* the horse, and the horse is Pegasus." Pegasus, the winged horse, was born from the corpse of the slain Medusa. When the petrifying Gorgon of history is faced and overcome, Pegasus, the horse of the imagination, is born.<sup>116</sup> It is the wooden horse which Odysseus can secrete by trickery over the walls of an impregnable citadel. It is a flying horse, borne up by inspiration. It is a small sea-horse, whose enigmatic silhouette features on the cover of the original Faber edition of *Omeros*.<sup>117</sup>

The cure is not left to stand as a triumphal end of the book. Framed as it is between Hector's death and Maud Plunkett's it makes no pretensions to abolish the organic processes of change and decay, though it may, through Ma Kilman again, allow Plunkett a glimpse beyond single vision after her death. Yet the poet's presence at Maud's funeral and his meeting with Plunkett next day at the bank reconcile them too; in a wonderfully theatrical scene the poet's resentment at his ingrained habit of respect for the imperial military figure which makes him address Plunkett as 'sir' is melted during the conversation which ends with Plunkett's own respectful "Nice to see you, sir."<sup>118</sup> The Joycean revelation that he is no major but only a sergeant-major balances the poet's rejection of epic parallels at this point. But we have now come to see that in the fluid interconnectedness of a new type of metaphor, the refutation is not what it seems. Each thing is truly itself, as it is also metaphor. The

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<sup>115</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 14

<sup>116</sup> "... history, that Medusa of the New World" (Walcott, 'The Muse of History' in *What the Twilight Says*, p. 36) needs to be confronted in some form, for "A people without history / Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern / of timeless moments." (T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding' from *Four Quartets*, *Complete Poems and Plays*, p. 197)

<sup>117</sup> The choice of cover design might be surprising, in view of the fact that sea-horses are hardly mentioned in the poem. A clue, however, is given in the last lines of the poem 'Menelaus':

Ten years. Wasted in quarrel  
for sea-grey eyes. A whore's.  
Under me, crusted in coral,  
towers pass, and a small sea-horse.

(Walcott, *The Arkansas Testament*, p. 101)

<sup>118</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 270



characters are themselves but also fiction.<sup>119</sup> The reason Achilles and Hector cannot be just two fishermen quarrelling in a rumshop is that in 'single vision' it would remain no more than that, a banal occurrence, prompting no more than a moment's amused or pitying attention, merely confirming Naipaul's notorious judgement: "History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies."<sup>120</sup> When the poet meets Homer himself in Chapter LVI, Homer claims "A girl smells better than a book,"<sup>121</sup> and yet, of course, it is only through his book, his art, that the girl and her significance have sprung across the ages to Walcott's poem and on to us, his readers. Walcott's point is that both must be true, the art by which the truth of experience can be known, and the experience without which the art would be a mere hollow gesture.

In the final book, after the disavowal that Walcott likes to emphasize, in which, guided by Homer, the poet is shown an infernal vision in the Malebolge of the dangers of the poetic ego, there is a third movement reasserting the Homeric dimension with renewed force, so that the final chapter, in one of the few direct echoes of *The Iliad*, allows the poet to close retrospectively: "I sang of quiet Achilles, Afolabe's son,"<sup>122</sup> as the Greek original opened: "Sing, goddess, the anger of Pelles' son Achilles",<sup>123</sup> and the question:

Why waste lines on Achilles, a shade on the sea-floor?

finds an immediate answer:

Because strong as self-healing coral, a quiet culture  
is branching from the white ribs of each ancestor,

deeper than it seems on the surface; slowly but sure,  
it will change us with the fluent sculpture of Time,  
it will grip like the polyp...<sup>124</sup>

in an undersea world reminiscent of the glowing realm in which a distracted Newton sits in Blake's illustration. The bones becoming coral recall *The Tempest* once more, and the 'parodic architecture' Walcott describes, of 'crusted columns', 'porous temples', 'spiked minarets' becoming a metonym for the organic growth of cross-cultural Caribbean society under the ripples of 'God's light' is strongly reminiscent of Prospero's vision of gorgeous

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<sup>119</sup> Of the funeral Walcott writes: "I was both there and not there. I was attending / the funeral of a character I'd created." (Ibid., p. 266)

<sup>120</sup> Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*, p. 29

<sup>121</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 284

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 320

<sup>123</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, (trans. Lattimore), p. 59



palaces and solemn temples in an infinitely fluent medium. When Achille leaves the beach "the sea was still going on".<sup>125</sup> The valedictory tone with which the poem closes is that of the Magus whose delight in the material world is rediscovering the power of 'the soul standing, not falling', whose tears might be for joy because "a full moon shone like a slice of raw onion."<sup>126</sup>



24. Fishermen with pirogues, Soufrière, St Lucia



25. Scottie's Bar (No Pain Café), Gros-Ilet, St Lucia

<sup>124</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, p. 296

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325



## Chapter Ten

### Gift of the Magus: The Novels of Wilson Harris

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The works examined in the previous chapters have revealed a number of interrelated themes to do with the imagination and the perception of reality, intimately bound up with magic and a sense of spiritual purpose, which resonate with central Renaissance texts and the Gnostic / Hermetic doctrines that gave them sustenance. The Gnostic / Hermetic initiative was quickly marginalized and eclipsed, partly, I have suggested, because it rejected divine and mundane authority, placing the human being at the centre of creative power and responsibility, and partly because in that position there lurked great dangers from forces within the psyche experienced as magical projections. The tradition survived, however, as a living resource underlying the beliefs and work of the Renaissance Magus figures and faintly echoed in European folk traditions, to emerge in the Faust myth crystallized by Marlowe, which turned on the central questions of being (*on kai me on*) and time. Faust's studies reveal the chance of overcoming the constraints of what is perceived as external to himself, but he is fooled into mistaking the world he has created for an independent reality. As a consequence he loses himself in the brutal emptiness of power and technology while releasing the uncontrolled elements of his own psyche to dominate him. The image of the soul he has lost is revealed to him as the Gnostic Helen. I related this Gnostic fall to the enigmatic Agrippan goal of the soul standing and not falling. Just as the Gnostic / Hermetic techniques of alchemy, designed to revalue the worthless into the priceless, failed if they sought to make ordinary gold, so this falling, I have suggested, is intimately connected with the roots of words meaning 'happen': by making things happen in what appears to be a separate reality existing independently of the human being, power is surrendered to the laws of causality controlling what is and what is not in that reality, and the entropic and organic processes of time. Rational analysis then suffices to trap human beings in a meaningless and unredeemable void, however much their technical mastery can twist and tear and alter the



surface of that reality. We have seen how this process is mirrored in the Gnostic / Hermetic texts.

At the same time it has been suggested that this is not the whole story. We have followed the clues offered by the folk song 'Scarborough Fair' to suggest that impossible tasks have been set the lover by a perilous muse. If an 'impossible' balance can be recovered, by which things are true and not true at the same time, on the borders between the unconscious and the conscious, the way back to the reintegration of the divine and the material might be found, the philosopher's stone of the revelation of true humanity. Both Marlowe and Shakespeare, echoing clues in Renaissance philosophy and Gnostic texts (e.g. "the Word was God"), suggest the task is possible with the resources of language. Language, going beyond the mimetic description of apparent reality in 'single vision', is capable of magic through metonymy and image — the products of the creative imagination<sup>1</sup> — and they in turn, as the previous chapters have shown, allow a synergy of conscious and unconscious potentialities to affect what was taken for reality through the power of synchronicity, but only in harmony with the true state of the psyche. By this the fixed boundaries of *on kai me on* are suspended and access obtained to the only resources that are outside time, those unconscious resources of the imagination working through arts such as narrative and poetry. The writer explores these resources less through rational intellect or learned techniques than through self-critical intuition.

We have observed that, parallel to the reification that traps Faust, rationality, with its tools of division and analysis and its insistence on objectivity, has stressed the masculine, manipulative values at the expense of the synthesizing and nurturing feminine. I have spoken of Helen, as Faust's lost soul, abandoned to the brothel of the material. Hence the importance of the anima figure, as bright muse or as perilous temptation, at the centre of the works I have mentioned. She is the occasion of the Gnostic fall but the only means of possible redemption. She requires an end to the marginalization of the feminine within culture.

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<sup>1</sup> One is led to suspect a connection in the etymology of these words. It is a sign of conventional misunderstandings about the words *image* and *imagination* that the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966) insists that *imago* is related to *imitare*.



We have also seen that masculine conquistadorial objectification led directly to the manipulation of the material world through technology and its conquest by colonial expansion. Other peoples and cultures were as blindly and remorselessly subjected to that complacent sense of missionary exploitation as were the European populations themselves, while the rational interpretation of the world hardened its single vision into the laws of Newtonian science — the guardians of the citadel of mimetic universality. It was only at the end of the period of European colonialism, as the margins found their own voices, that a strange and unexpected phenomenon began to emerge. Instead of an implacable opposition between the monolithic former oppressors and the newly liberated, the greatest postcolonial writers seemed to be laying claim to an intimate dialogue with a central position in traditions rejected by early postcolonial theorists as alien and eurocentric. Accusations of selling out and treachery understandably flew. But what my analyses show is that these writers had recognized a tradition within Europe that European culture had itself marginalized, but a tradition that remained alive and radiant — though often eclipsed — to speak to the resurgent margins of mutual concerns, the empowerment of the human being. In those hidden mutualities the dualism between metropolis and periphery, secular and religious, science and arts, might be superseded.

In the introduction to this study I quoted Wilson Harris, whose optimism, though far from euphoric, is explicitly grounded in gnosis. Harris, in a talk entitled 'Ways to Enjoy Literature', quotes from his novel *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* in asking the question:

"Is space itself a giant shell, a giant surrogate ear of a multi-dimensional God?" A surrogate ear? And this is where I must confess my allegiance to the gnostic heresy. I believe that the creation in which we live is, that it will be continuously, tormented. But yet it can evolve, it can evolve, and in evolving it moves towards some Spirit which possesses absolute knowledge. But that absolute knowledge is not available to us. We evolve towards that absolute knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

An imperfect material creation, freed from the confinement of single vision, acts as an organ of perception — or an agency of response — to begin to understand and speak to what seems at first the illusion of the sea within a shell but which is the imperilled soteriological Gnostic spark. This sacerdotal premise<sup>3</sup> implies a rejection of mimetic linear narrative or

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<sup>2</sup> Harris, 'Ways to Enjoy Literature', Debusscher & Maufort (eds) *Union in Partition. Essays in Honour of Jeanne Delbaere*, p. 207

<sup>3</sup> "We need today, it seems to me, an openness to the language of the Imagination simultaneous with a grasp of the sacred, which requires self-confessional and profound, self-judgmental art rooted in a spectrum of



'realism' in favour of a dynamic density interacting with 'reality'. Harris writes: "At the edge of the mimicry of natural fact lies a pit into which cultures fall when they succumb to the idolatries of cruel appearance."<sup>4</sup> Harris argues that in mimetic realist fiction the sovereign conscious ego mistakes certain partialities and biased viewpoints within a culture for the whole picture. Developed with the coherence of logic into a static and closed system, these biased appearances become framed within a society's conventions. Harris terms this state of affairs 'predatory coherence', of which 'stereotypical purities', destructive of the self and others,<sup>5</sup> like the self-righteous hubris of conquistadorial or imperialist (or postcolonial) cultures but also the 'self-righteous deprivation' or victimhood of marginalized cultures are symptomatic.<sup>6</sup>

Harris's alternative is an 'Adamic' use of the past and present *sub specie aeternitatis* in a creative, generative process centred in the imagination, which Harris refers to frequently as 'memory theatre',<sup>7</sup> an 'infinite rehearsal' (not only of infinite possibilities, but also with an uncompromising aim to comprehend infinity) and the 'unfinished genesis of the imagination'. What is excluded by predatory coherence, the eclipsed and the marginalized, becomes a gnawing core of asymmetry and regenerative potential by which biases can be recognized and overcome. In this sense Harris becomes a spokesperson for marginalized

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variable identity." (Harris, 'Imagination Dead Imagine: Bridging a Chasm', *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7/1, 1994, p. 191)

<sup>4</sup> Harris, 'Some Aspects of Myth and the Intuitive Imagination' in *Explorations*, p. 102. Hena Maes-Jelinek comments: "Wilson Harris, who emphasized the links between imperialism and the rise of the novel nearly thirty years ago, [ ... ] has since repeatedly shown that realism both as a way of perceiving and acting upon the world and as a mode of writing is arbitrary in its failure to acknowledge whole areas of experience, while the concomitant growing influence of rationalism reduced the earth itself to a 'passive creature' cut off from its roots." Maes-Jelinek, 'Charting the Uncapturable in Wilson Harris's Writing' in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 17/2, 1997, p. 91

<sup>5</sup> Harris shows how a perverse projection of royal incest to preserve a ruling line might be seen to harden into "projected violence by the state upon others to preserve stereotypical purities. The stranger is targeted, the foreigner is targeted, the refugee is targeted as impure." (Harris, 'Imagination Dead Imagine', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 7/1, 1994, p.188) Harris thus establishes a link between 'predatory coherence' and the obscenity of 'ethnic cleansing'.

<sup>6</sup> Harris diagnoses 'self-righteous deprivation' as a specifically postcolonial malaise: "When the empire dissolves, the former states of the empire are in a situation where real power has decomposed. This is where you find that a popular movement cannot penetrate the troubles of the time because it invests its energies in a self-righteous deprivation. It continues to reiterate its disadvantages against the seas of imperialism. It seems to lack the genius to find a new kind of association with other powers." (Wilson Harris interviewed by Alan Riach in Riach & Williams (eds), *The Radical Imagination*, p. 37)

<sup>7</sup> Harris frequently mentions his debt to Francis Yates, whose work on the 'Memory Theatre' of Giulio Camillo and the systems of magical correspondences in the systems of Lull, Bruno and Fludd in *The Art of Memory* indicates a clear link between Harris and the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.



peoples and cultures,<sup>8</sup> just as this study has argued for a revaluation of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition within European culture. In particular Harris's work allows glimpses of the many broken and eclipsed cultural traditions associated with the heterogeneous populations of South and Central America and the Caribbean and their relevance to imaginative genesis.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as single vision manipulation of the material world led to the subjection of colonized peoples, the reverse process could be set in train by a revaluation of their legacies helping to break down the fastnesses of mimetic realism, instigating a dialogue between apparently closed systems.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Born and educated in Guyana, where he first worked as a surveyor in the interior, Harris has lived and written in Britain for many years: "I live in Europe, but I know I am on the margins. I am paradoxically outside of European establishments and enclosures as — though my work is rooted in a dream-map of Guyana [ ... ] — one is outside of colonial enclosures in so-called Third World societies. One seeks a different community, a wholly different global community." (Harris, 'The Psyche of Space (Intuition and Otherness)', Durix (ed.) *Theory and Literary Creation*, p. 16)

<sup>9</sup> Nathaniel Mackey implies certain similarities with Walcott's discussion of history (see pp. 200f.) when he stresses: "Harris is adamant that the opportunities afforded by the Caribbean 'void' or 'incoherency,' opportunities for experimentation and possible innovation, for the 'constant baptism of newly created things,' not be overlooked." (Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement*, p. 167) Antonio Benítez-Rojo's discussion of Harris in *The Repeating Island* can be seen in this context. Harris himself has written memorably on the subject of the European, African and East Indian inhabitants of the region and the Amerindian legacy in the three Mittelholzer Lectures comprising 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas', Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, pp. 152-95. Harris castigates general Western ignorance of pre-columbian civilizations such as the Mayan, which he points out, "suffers an astonishing neglect of its influences on the art, the architecture, the philosophy of the West", for instance in influences on Frank Lloyd Wright suggested by Barbara Braun. (Harris, 'The Psyche of Space', Durix (ed.) *Theory and Literary Creation*, p. 16)

Among pre-columbian legacies Harris has discussed the Carib bone-flute — in which the ritual cannibal morsal can be seen metonymically as the consumption of biases to reveal a visionary instrument — and the 'rainbow bridge' of pre-columbian deities from Quetzalcoatl to Yurokon in his new preface to *Palace of the Peacock*, the Arawak foodbearing tree, which he sees resonating in W. H. Hudson's study of anima fascination *Green Mansions*, in 'Jean Rhys's Tree of Life', and the bush-baby spectres and 'immortal child' in 'The Amerindian Legacy' (all in Bundy (ed.) *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*). See also the investigations of Russell McDougall into the legacy of ethnologists like Walter Roth in 'Walter Roth, Wilson Harris, and a Caribbean / Postcolonial Theory of Modernism', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 67/2, 1998, pp. 567-91 and 'Wilson Harris on the Frontiers of Myth Criticism / 1978-1983' in *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2/1,2&3, 2000, pp. 109-121, as well as Paula Burnett's notes on Mayan traditions in 'Memory Theatre and the Maya: Othering Eschatology in Wilson Harris's *Jonestown*', *Ibid.*, pp. 215-232.

<sup>10</sup> "Freedom, it seems to me, will become progressively meaningless unless humanity can arrive upon provisional bridges between what appear to be closed minds, closed disciplines, closed orders. There is [ ... ] shared territory between windows upon reality we tragically reinforce into absolutes. To attempt to arrive at another absolute theory, another absolute description of such shared territory, is to succumb to further fallacy and apparently incorrigible tragedy. The real possibility, it seems to me, lies in the changed fabric of language as it draws upon unsuspected resources within an unfinished genesis of the imagination." (Harris, 'Imagination Dead Imagine', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 7/1, 1994, p. 194f.) Harris distinguishes between a mere 'umbrella of tolerance' involved in multi-culturality — "There is an incorrigible focus in multi-culturality. Each culture regards itself as intact (including the dominant establishment) and the quest for wholeness lies solely within itself" (The Age of the Imagination', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2/1,2&3, 2000, p. 17) — and true cross-culturality. The need for such dialogue applies not only to nations or ethnic groups but also to the arts and sciences, or even within the humanities themselves.



A perverted misreading of the world apparently subject to laws of *on kai me on* and irreversible linear time closes off the chance of alchemical redemption. But much as quantum mechanics destabilized the Newtonian conception of the cosmos by introducing indeterminacy into the description of phenomena, Harris creates a new conceptual language of the imagination<sup>11</sup> to describe a world where things simultaneously are and are not both within and beyond time.<sup>12</sup> Blakean fourfold vision is set the formidable task of changing the novel — the apparently linear process of fictional narration — to provide a recognizable, dynamic model of the real world which has been subtly shifted and tilted so that through the cracks and unfamiliarities of perspective a more fundamental truth about reality and its indeterminacy is revealed, and by doing so of magically influencing the world.<sup>13</sup> Imagination here is not a solipsistic function of the conscious ego, but plays the same soteriological role implicit throughout the Gnostic / Hermetic writings. It is not the result of theoretical considerations, but of sensual engagement with the material world: "When I travelled in the rain forests of Guyana for the first time — when I faced the immensity of the rain forests, all the connections, the subtleties, I realized that I could not describe what I saw within a story-line frame that reduced nature to a passive absolute."<sup>14</sup> The need to express such subtleties led to a particular method of composition which involves the discovery of potent and vital (numinous), multi-faceted, partial images:

These intuitive images are netted by the drafts of the novels one writes. My feeling is that this kind of netting of intuitive images is one way of picking up elements that are apparently frail, that flash through: in one's ordinary life one would miss them.<sup>15</sup> [ ... ]

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<sup>11</sup> "The quantum imagination, in my view, may be curiously visualized as a revisionary epic which seeks to reclaim extrahuman faculties in incandescent equations between being and nonbeing." (Harris, 'Creoleness', Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, p. 246)

<sup>12</sup> "We need to sense all of these possibilities and to have a strategy that seems to release the implications of these uncertainties. As we rehearse these implications we find that what has happened in the past is not totally locked away from us. It is not totally lost to us. It addresses us intimately and addresses our prepossessions and our biases. It begins to shift the centre of our biases. It begins to promote an involvement with the past that is equally an involvement with the present, even as the present becomes a threshold into the future. So we have a kind of ceaseless rehearsal in which we may have what appear to be constant images, but those images undermine themselves, they secrete new content within themselves and they bring to bear upon us some way of re-visioning our own biases, of altering the ground, the apparently solid ground on which we stand." (Harris, 'Judgement and Dream', Riach & Williams (eds), *The Radical Imagination*, p. 18) Remarks like this make it clear why he contrasts his work with superficial similarities in post-modernism, which he criticizes as nihilistic and lacking in seriousness.

<sup>13</sup> Harris's vision may be felt to be primarily poetic, and his poetry from *Eternity to Season* (1954) to 'The Winter Christ' (1999) provides seminal insights, but he clearly regards it as subsidiary to the novels.

<sup>14</sup> Harris, 'The Fabric of the Imagination', Riach & Williams (eds), *The Radical Imagination*, p. 72

<sup>15</sup> The word 'net' here takes on the ambiguity of fishing-net and network inherent in the web of Trickster Anancy.



And then when one scans the draft, one comes upon these curious intuitive images, that address one as if they had been planted by another hand. [ ... ]

These multi-faceted images play back, one upon the other, and because of the intuitive element, there remains something that cannot be trapped. In other words, however much one concentrates on what one is doing, that element secretes itself and it cannot be trapped.<sup>16</sup>

What is described here, a form of composition which privileges the imaginative revelation of the unconscious, is consonant with the process of intuitive 'scanning' which Anton Ehrenzweig, in *The Hidden Order of Art*, sees as the key to accessing and comprehending a more fundamental and true order than consciousness, with its tendency towards a 'law of closure' rounding off and simplifying anomalies to its own position, can entertain: "An incoherent fragment, a disruptive form element is better able to break the narrow focus of intellectual thought and produce a fissure in the mind's smooth surface which leads down to the depth of the unconscious."<sup>17</sup> The 'other hand' which Harris refers to is an address from the unconscious mind, the "nucleus of strangers in the self",<sup>18</sup> though that does not mean an easy process of the fiction somehow writing itself, but a hard struggle: "Taking back from the work on a conscious level what has been projected into it on an unconscious level is perhaps the most fruitful and painful part of creativity."<sup>19</sup> The figures and images contained in Harris's fiction, many of which are broken archetypes, adversarial twins shadowing each other, patterns of triads and quaternities figuring the stuff of dream and myth, emerge from a universal matrix of the unconscious psyche such as was termed by Jung the 'collective unconscious', though Harris goes further to talk of a 'universal unconscious'<sup>20</sup> extending through to the inanimate material world, and a reading of Harris may find useful points of

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<sup>16</sup> Wilson Harris interviewed by Alan Riach, Riach & Williams (eds), *The Radical Imagination*, pp. 33f. (The word 'secrete' again carries the ambiguity of a hidden substance and a trace from within. For a similar description of the process, see 'Literacy and the Imagination' in Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, p. 50

<sup>18</sup> Wilson Harris interviewed by Charles Rowell, *Callaloo* 18/1, 1995, p. 198

<sup>19</sup> Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, p. 57. Ehrenzweig's further arguments on self-creation, though couched in a frame of orthodox Freudian terminology and tending to refer too reductively to physical processes, apply perfectly to the divine power of the imagination subscribed to by the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition.

<sup>20</sup> "Jung by and large applied his concept to the human psyche and faculty. I sense the collective or universal unconscious extending into voices that echo within the roots of nature as from the ancestral dead, from rivers, from rocks, from birds and other species, from the rhythm of landscapes, skyscapes, etc." (Harris, 'Profiles of Myth and the New World', Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, p. 201) It could be argued that this broader conception of a universal unconscious is implied in Jung's work on synchronicity.



orientation corresponding with Jungian terminology.<sup>21</sup> To illustrate Harris's unique importance more clearly, I shall look in more detail at a number of novels in which the themes central to this study emerge most clearly.<sup>22</sup>

Even today, the originality of Wilson Harris's first published novel, *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), is astonishing.<sup>23</sup> The Guyanese writer and critic Michael Gilkes, writing in 1975, suggested links which connect Harris to the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition, through Jung, Yeats, Blake and the alchemical and hermetic texts of the Renaissance: "Herein lies the significance of Harris's interest in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Medieval and Renaissance cabbalists. Indeed, if Harris can be placed within any tradition at all, he belongs here. For this is precisely the nature of his own alchemical art..."<sup>24</sup> *Palace of the Peacock* centres on a redemptive journey inspired by a perilous muse. The novel opens with the ambiguous death of the main character, Donne, a 'horseman' whose death is couched in imagery of shooting and hanging, though he and all his 'legendary' crew have drowned. The 'coiling' and 'running' of the wind, the 'breakneck' stride, the devil's smile echoing the grinning horse, the bow as the shot pulls the horseman up "like a hanging man to his executioner"<sup>25</sup> have all been commented on at length by Harris himself.<sup>26</sup> Through this imagery, he is able to create a balance between an event which has happened and yet not happened, to enter a realm of quantum indeterminacy beyond *on kai me on*, where Donne, the horseman, is also the first person narrator who 'dreams': "I awoke with one dead seeing

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<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that Harris follows Jung: "Jung never influenced me, but I had a dialogue with him." (Wilson Harris interviewed by Alan Riach, p. 62) Apart from Jung, Timothy Cribb suggests some points of orientation in reading Harris among modernist writers, but suggests that as a visionary he has most in common with Blake. (Cribb, 'Toward the Reading of Wilson Harris', *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 17/2, 1997, pp. 59-62)

<sup>22</sup> However, one should make clear that, when studying what Aldon Nielsen calls the 'compressed epic spaces' in Harris's work, "it is nearly a disservice to speak of discrete volumes when entering the landscape of Harris's fiction. Not only do the works group together in quartets and trilogies; we are apt, when reading a Harris novel, suddenly to come upon the recognizable fossil forms of earlier or later novels". (Nielsen, 'Composite Epic', *Hambone* 13, 1997, p. 186)

<sup>23</sup> The publication of the novel by Faber and Faber was not a foregone conclusion but due to the intervention of the 'discoverer' of William Golding, Charles Monteith. Harris was equally lucky in quickly finding two perceptive and sensitive critics in Michael Gilkes and Hena Maes-Jelinck. Maes-Jelinck's detailed commentaries on Harris's work, models of sympathetic textual analysis, have not been surpassed.

<sup>24</sup> Gilkes, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*, p. 36

<sup>25</sup> Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, p. 19

<sup>26</sup> E.g. in the new preface to *Palace of the Peacock* (Faber & Faber, 1998, pp. 2-12), reprinted in Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays*, pp. 53-7. See also 'Judgement and Dream' in Riach & Williams (eds) *The Radical Imagination*, pp. 18-21



eye and one living closed eye."<sup>27</sup> Donne is both imperialist oppressor and visionary poet (and the historical John Donne whose father-in-law's most celebrated theatrical role was Doctor Faustus inhabits a similarly ambivalent space in Walcott's 'Ruins of a Great House', when his 'ashen prose' burns the eyes of the poet thinking of "ancestral murderers and poets").

Outside time — the goal of Donne's journey, the stilted 'brooding, hanging house' in the savannahs, lies before its commencement — and with a crew consisting of mysterious twinships (like those of the adventurer / dreamer himself) representing the diverse peoples of Guyana linked by synchronicity to Harris's historical surveying crew and merging into a single complex identity (what Ivan van Sertima calls 'foci of community'), Donne is engaged in the pursuit of the muse Mariella, the fugitive soul who has been oppressed and abused but who incarnates their only lure, hope and resource. Mariella is also the 'mission' and, as is clear from following the clues planted within the imagery, is the boat and water itself, as well as the rock and cause of Donne's death and fall. Her handkerchief is the fabric of the material world. But paradoxically, as the members of the crew, the single multiple personality, experience their second death, they are lifted by the Mercurius muse in a network of spider-web imagery to re-vision their lives and relationships until, within a new sequence of creation, they are able to ascend the fall and hear the music of the flute in translated densities. They consume their own biases to learn the secrets of their enemy selves and transcend them. In the final apotheosis the noose which had hung Donne becomes his paradoxical support<sup>28</sup> as the frames that had held him are transformed by alchemy within the *cauda pavonis* into windows in which the true nature of his soul is revealed to him and the mystery of the sacrament of community, the "true alien spiritual love".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, p. 19

<sup>28</sup> "In the novel, as I wrote it, the 'second death' ushered in a change of pattern, a break in the mould of the fiction, so to speak. A partial image carried on — to put it crudely — into the new phase, seemed the same, but had *qualitatively* altered its value to deepen, as it were, the ground of conscience, *the conscience in the creative act*. A noose is a noose is not a noose." (Harris, Interview with Jane Wilkinson, *Kunapipi* 8/2, 1986, p. 35) (author's emphases) Harris describes a fascinating case of synchronicity in which, after needing to cut the anchor from a boat in difficulty above Tumatumari, he found himself three years later in imminent danger of decapitation by the rocks when the anchor on his team's boat fouled an underwater object, which turned out to be the first anchor. (Harris, 'A Talk on the Subjective Imagination', *Explorations*, pp. 59f.)

<sup>29</sup> Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, p. 116. In addition to striking resonances in the novel with the imagery of horses, discussed in relation to both Fugard and Walcott in previous chapters, there are parallels with the experience of Dimetos and Lydia, whose hanging is also the paradoxical agent of despair and revenge of the



Donne is a Faustian seeker whose journey also alludes to Marlow's in *Heart of Darkness*.

He is lured and tempted by the same Faustian errors in seeking the muse of 'involute spirit':

It seemed to me that such a glimpse of perfection was a most cruel and distressing fact in that it brought me face to face with my own enormous frailty. It grew increasingly hard to believe that this blindness and error were all my material fantasy rather than the flaw of a universal creation. For manhood's sake and estate I saw there must arise the devil of resistance and incredulity towards a grotesque muse which abandoned and killed and saved all at the same time with the power of indestructible understanding and life.<sup>30</sup>

A waterfall, which both falls and unaccountably rises as a seemingly static wall of water, or rather, as Harris has pointed out, gently varies in the tidal motion of its stage discharge like a breathing sea of the unconscious, full of awesome might and lure yet approachable from the side as if it was tame, is also the central setting of *Tumatumari* (1968),<sup>31</sup> rapids whose name means 'sleeping rocks'. The falls, and the rocks within the unconscious, can then be associated with the 'muse' from *Palace of the Peacock*. Roi Solman, the engineer whose fall and decapitation on the rock are recounted at the opening of the novel, bears traces of Fenwick, the engineer and surveyor of *The Secret Ladder* (1963), whose rational beliefs, symbolized by his involvement in drainage and sea-defence plans, are destabilized through his meeting with the descendant of runaway slaves on the Canje, Poseidon, and whose dream involving the decapitation of the gorgon Medusa might release the magic horse Pegasus. The figure of Poseidon is the subject of a detailed study by Nathaniel Mackey, who dwells on the moment Poseidon addresses Fenwick as a moment of 'discrepancy':

Poseidon addressed Fenwick at last. His mouth moved and made frames which did not correspond to the words he actually uttered. It was like the tragic lips of an actor, moving but soundless as a picture, galvanized into comic association with a foreign dubbing and tongue which uttered a mechanical version and translation out of accord with the visible features of original expression.<sup>32</sup>

"Discrepant engagement," says Mackey, "dislodges or seeks to dislodge homogeneous models of identity, assumptions of monolithic form, purist expectation, redefining 'the features of original expression'."<sup>33</sup> Fenwick is unable to 'read' Poseidon, though reluctant to

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dark muse while providing the key to transforming the rigid frame of Newtonian law into the open window of the imagination.

<sup>30</sup> Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, p. 43

<sup>31</sup> Gilkes suggests, rightly in my opinion, that Harris's early work culminates in *Tumatumari*, though this novel is far less often discussed than the *Guyana Quartet*: "Harris here seems to gather together all the threads of his earlier work, and in Prudence's dreaming consciousness, history, myth, racial and cultural ancestry, social and political division, the development of the Caribbean psyche all became involved in a re-creative act of memory." Gilkes, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*, p. 122

<sup>32</sup> Harris, *The Guyana Quartet*, p. 371

<sup>33</sup> Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement*, p. 189



admit it, and is also baffled by his name. Yet Poseidon, the descendant of the slave victims who had inspired Blake's visions of bondage and torture, is a 'black king of history' who demands justice. Fenwick writes to his mother: "I wish I could truly grasp the importance of this meeting. If I do not — if my generation do not — Leviathan will swallow us all."<sup>34</sup> Poseidon is a Caliban with "ragged fins of trousers"<sup>35</sup> and "silent accents of an ageless dumb spirit"<sup>36</sup> which makes him the voice of black resistance, and the resistance of autonomous contents of the unconscious to the rational planning of conquistadorial technology.<sup>37</sup> Yet, with his Greek name, he carries synchronistically the attributes of the god of the unconscious sea whose wedding to Demeter in the shape of the mare is echoed in the book by the mare standing near Poseidon when he dies:

His head struck the rim of the bucket on the ground and he lay on an animal of shadow as if the horse had kicked him until he finally fell bleeding under her. Crimson stars spattered Catalena's dress.<sup>38</sup>

That this constellation of images prefigures those found in Fugard's *Dimetos* should come as no surprise; Fenwick, whose boat is called 'Palace of the Peacock', attempts like Donne to gain visionary powers within seven days, a Faustian pact, and is obsessed, like Dimetos, with the union of hand and heart. Gilkes<sup>39</sup> has convincingly demonstrated the alchemical nature of the imagery which associates Poseidon with the '*cri de Merlin*', the eclipsed 'adversarial twin'<sup>40</sup> of Parsifal described by Jung<sup>41</sup> and taken up again by Harris in an essay in 1997.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Harris, *The Guyana Quartet*, p. 384. Jonah Jones in *Jonestown* is swallowed by the white whale of his utopian project, and Roi Solman is decapitated. In a piece of macabre synchronicity, during the writing of these pages a news item was broadcast about the severed head of a man being discovered in the belly of a large fish near the Australian coast.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 370

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 371

<sup>37</sup> Harris has pointed out that the geometrical drainage of the Guyana coastlands ignored watersheds that were invisible to common sense, destroying natural catchments and exacerbating flooding to the benefit of plantation owners and the detriment of peasant farmers.

<sup>38</sup> Harris, *The Guyana Quartet*, p. 457

<sup>39</sup> Gilkes, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*, pp. 86-96

<sup>40</sup> 'Adversarial twins' are linked by a close family resemblance combined with fundamental contradiction, so that their core biases tend to reveal each other. Gilkes, prophetically, stresses the adversarial twinship theme in Fenwick's relief that Chiung, the night-reader and Fenwick's left-hand man, has been the target of Poseidon's men, who mistake him for Fenwick because Fenwick has lent him his coat. It is only in *Jonestown* that Francisco Bone will voluntarily wear Deacon's mask and be judged in his stead. Gilkes also shows how Poseidon's two men can be related to Hermes / Mercurius as trickster figures when they re-appear as the annunciation of dread rescue to Catalena as she lies under imminent threat of rape and murder, a point elucidated by Harris in terms of a "balance between sacrament and terror" in 'Literacy and the Imagination', Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays*, pp. 76f.



*Tumatumari*, though bound in, then, with the previous novels, contains important new features, the most significant being the change in the 'centre of consciousness'. Whereas Donne and Fenwick, like Stevenson in *Heartland*, are examples of masculine consciousness attempting a sacred quest inspired and endangered by a perilous muse, Prudence in *Tumatumari* is the essential female focus presiding over the 'chair of the well', which, as the visionary counterpart and slow-motion rising analysis of the fall of the rapids, forms the heart of the novel. As such she can be closely associated with the Titian painting 'Allegory of Prudence', which Harris discusses in the essay 'In the Name of Liberty':

Prudence, (whom one tends to associate with the feminine) is portrayed in Titian's painting as a male face or mask beneath which appear three animal heads, a wolf, a lion, a dog.<sup>43</sup>

Harris points out that Frances Yates, in *The Art of Memory*, had spoken of the three parts of *prudentia: memoria, intelligentia, providentia*. To achieve a "genuine rehearsal of legacies of tradition" the partial nature of ruling appearances must be revised. Thus Prudence, in Harris's novel, is bound up with the fate of her engineer husband Roi (*intelligentia*), but also with her father Henry Tenby, the historian (*memoria*). The third part of her should be her child (*providentia*), which she apparently loses at the start of the novel, but which in fact becomes the 'body' of the fiction itself.

*Tumatumari* is particularly exemplary in seeing just how Harris's language — comparably with Walcott's in the previous chapter — achieves the impossible magical balance between being and non-being. The 'head' which she finds in the water below the falls is simultaneously her own reflection, a weed-covered rock (which decapitates her husband), a whirlpool, her dead husband's head, her father, her own child,<sup>44</sup> the sun (Solman) reflecting her head as black, like her Amerindian rival and husband's pregnant mistress Rakka. It is also a "dripping cradle"<sup>45</sup> which she carries away, "pregnant with possibilities", after stifling an "intimate and alien cry" (*cri de Merlin*) in her own throat. The reader is then informed that Prudence has awoken from a dream while suffering from a

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<sup>41</sup> Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 255. Jung describes how in the Arthurian legends, after Merlin is trapped by Nimuë (or Morgana) in the forest of Broceliande (the unconscious), all that can be heard are his incomprehensible cries.

<sup>42</sup> Harris, 'Merlin and Parsifal' in Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays*, pp. 58-66

<sup>43</sup> Harris, 'In the Name of Liberty', Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays*, p. 218

<sup>44</sup> "Was it father or child she beheld?" Harris, *Tumatumari*, p. 14 (author's emphasis)



nervous breakdown. The head is a ruling function of sovereign consciousness, or King Solomon (the Masonic and Templar ritual head), or the sacrificed Amerindian sun-king, or the beheaded sacrificial Aztec ballplayer, or the beheaded king of the alchemical *opus*, or the head and Grail of the Fisher King, or the Gorgon's head, or the guillotined head of revolution (heads must roll), or that of Osiris (or Tammuz or Dairmid), which is the 'game' of Tumatumari, the hunted boar: "This boar seems once to have been a sow with crescent-shaped tusks, the goddess herself as Persephone",<sup>46</sup> which Roi needs to "transport back from heaven".<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, the 'game of Tumatumari' is also the game 10-year-old Prudence plays with her father while she sits in a chair whose curved back she has marked with a name and a date. A microcosmic event like this (or her parents talking about her sister being pregnant,<sup>48</sup> or a near accident on the Corentyne road) can be the seeds of fiction, or the fictions of the macroscopic and archetypal facts involving the myths of the world and the histories of Europe, South America, and the rest of the globe. Which is which, the question of origin, has been completely erased.

Similarly, a colloquial phrase: "I ran into them myself under the waterfall,"<sup>49</sup> speaking of the mysterious silent Indians, mutates in associated themes of collision into Roi's death and the woman on the Corentyne road (East Indian), who is related to the muse of deprivation (the 'waif of the streets'), and Rakka's dead mother whose eyelids turn to stone, a form of *lapis* which contains the "chalice of purification and the begging bowl of humanity".<sup>50</sup>

Where Prudence sees the Indians, Roi has begun to construct a gauge next to the rapids. It is only a circular concrete rim and what looks like a well, covered with planks. This is the scene of Prudence's visions on what she calls the Chair of History (her father's professorial chair) and in this well she sees a secret staircase. She sits on the chair of the well between the extremes of height and depth in a structure designed to *measure* stage discharge. The

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 15

<sup>46</sup> Graves, *The Greek Myths*, p. 72

<sup>47</sup> Harris, *Tumatumari*, p. 52

<sup>48</sup> Note that this event occurs while Prudence is reading a poem by Laura Riding, cited by Harris as an author involved in the genesis of his own writing in an interview with Alan Riach, Riach & Williams (eds), *The Radical Imagination*, p. 60

<sup>49</sup> Harris, *Tumatumari*, p. 33

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 22



fluttering of the forest above and the smoky, fishy depths recall Quetzalcoatl, the deity present at the re-visionary moment when extremes meet. This is where Roi hits his head and becomes an 'electric fiend', recognizing that "the engineer in me is my devil".<sup>51</sup> Contrasting with the hubris of electric technology, the Indians are guides, but they are now under a vow of silence and seem constantly receding on the hidden stairs. They represent suppressed qualities of soul, and are oppressed in order to maintain a precious status quo of shortage and malnutrition. They emerge from misery, but are dreaded, and their unspoken speech presses letters into Prudence's consciousness like the letters of her name carved into the moss on the concrete rim of the well (which becomes the round of her skull and a kind of crown). The letters thus reveal a background constantly present under the foreground, substance beneath the accretions, just as the 'sleeping' rocks illustrate a fault or seam within the apparent smoothness of the narrative leading down to the sleeping inner life which Roi hunts as the sacred game of the unconscious (which he only knows how to shoot and kill) but whose living waters (spittle of death) help prompt Prudence's living visions. The fate of the Indians, ironically, parallels that of the Europeans who displace them: the sun loses its sacred power and is reified into an 'archeological ruin', a 'technological furnace'. The rock on which they shatter is a failure of technology. Now they need a dying god to free them from the wasteland of the 20th century.<sup>52</sup> They become a haunting presence demanding a 'ceremony of the rock' in which the engineering present can enter into dialogue with the historical past to redeem ancient cultures as well as with cries uttered by her husband (suffering a brain injury) and father (a heart attack).<sup>53</sup>

Prudence's father Henry Tenby represents the colonial history of repression and remorse for dividing 'his' children through "generations of inbuilt prejudice, histories, volumes under which he suffocated".<sup>54</sup> Besides Prudence, his redemptive consciousness, there is Pamela (virtue with beauty), who might 'pass as white', and Hugh Skelton, the dark 'skeleton in the cupboard' who will later be killed by 'his own kith and kin'. Tenby's wife Diana is also the victim of his conception of masculine superiority as she stiffens into blind

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>52</sup> The dying and self-re-creating god is the theme of the second part of Anton Ehrenzweig's *The Hidden Order of Art*. He sees the theme not merely as relating to agriculture, but to the creative imagination.

<sup>53</sup> These cries are surely related to the *cri de Merlin* (see p. 260)

<sup>54</sup> Harris, *Tumatumari*, p. 45



bourgeois prejudices. Only through Prudence's process of reintegration freed from chronology (from the downward flow of the river), which she can achieve after perceiving the eye in the Rock-Face of the Well, is the alchemical ascent of Rakka's underworld possible:<sup>55</sup> "not Luciferian descent but in fact the other way round — an uprush of wings of humility from the bottom of the pool."<sup>56</sup> Only by seeing through this eye from the passage through a Brothel of Masks can Prudence re-establish Henry Tenby's interrupted 'Conversation with the Muse' and confront the processes of history as they affect modern Guyana<sup>57</sup> (or for that matter the colonization that Rome brought to Britain from the Mediterranean).

A procession of multi-dimensional imagery linking the political and social condition of Guyana with many of the themes of the previous novels is set in train in which translations of weakness into expanding resources become possible. The translations of the head from petrifying Gorgon are achieved by an apotheosis of sight, which involves a Blakean perception of the infinite beyond and through the particular in a wild diversity of associations. At this point Prudence sees a vision of the 'Horse of the Well':

as it reared above her — suddenly and unaccountably wild, no longer implosive but explosive, out of control, like great horses of living and dead populations uplifted to trample her — there was an instantaneous flash from the Eye of her prison — the Gorgon's head translated into love — so mighty a love in the flicker of a raindrop — it kept the dreadful hooves upborne like a waterfall.<sup>58</sup>

The novel ends with Prudence willingly trusting herself to the falls in the Great Game of reality.

Harris's dialogue with the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition made it inevitable that he should have engaged with the foundations of W. B. Yeats' inspiration, in particular the occult sources of his imagination. The key to *The Angel at the Gate* (1982), in which that occurs, is the figure of Joseph Marsden, a magus presence from a territory Harris had first entered in *Black Marsden* ten years before. In the earlier novel Marsden had appeared before the

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<sup>55</sup> This is compared to the *Aurora Consurgens*, a central text of the alchemists in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition in which alchemy is identified as the *sapientia Dei* as expressed by the wisdom of Solomon. Jung summarizes the text in 'Psychology and Alchemy', Part III, *Collected Works* 12, pp. 376-96

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111

<sup>57</sup> Henry is forced to realize, for example, that his potential as a hit-and-run driver, either really on the road from Crabwood Creek, or in economic terms, must be acknowledged as a *real* responsibility. Comrade Block in Port Mourant (the politician of the independence movement) is thus right in his accusation of Tenby, though equally culpable in his one-sided insistence on the truth of the accident as a block function of a political line.



narrator Clive Goodrich (a Rich Fisher or Grail seeker) as a frozen, dark projection in the ruins of an ancient stone church. As a dark shadow and Mercurius he is described as doctor, clown, conjurer and hypnotist. He arrives as part of an awareness of "the harlequin cloak of the seasons" and is associated with ancient places and seas which ironically counterpoint Goodrich's material wealth from football *pools*. The narrator is stabbed from within himself by Marsden's piercing eyes, knives which metamorphose into shamanic quills (to fly and to write).

Doctor Marsden, as unconscious projection, moves into the narrator's Edinburgh home with three accompanying characters in the 'tabula rasa comedy'<sup>59</sup> One is Jennifer Gorgon, the beautiful muse found like Simon Magus's Helen in "an appalling dive in London". Jennifer is "the open-ended mystery of beauty — flesh into stone or vice versa",<sup>60</sup> so opens into the lure and temptation of the material. She wears a dress which Marsden claims is seamless and "a labour of love" (recalling one of the lover's tasks in 'Scarborough Fair'), which is a mathematical paradox of multiplied fractions becoming less rather than more. Then there is Knife, who is "straight or twisted as love or death".<sup>61</sup> Goodrich believes he met him in Jamaica. The third is Harp, a figure of artistic sensibility, "an essential ruined cage within ourselves / cradle of music / vibrating touchstone".<sup>62</sup> The narrator, lured by Jennifer's physical beauty, becomes involved in "the paradoxes of logical empirical reality and illogical immanent reality",<sup>63</sup> which lead him to be seduced into an attempt to hold her: "First a kiss to prove me real. Then something more to prove me more real. Then more and still more. How permissive is reality?"<sup>64</sup> whereby she of course paradoxically recedes. This is why Marsden wants her to play the role of Salome in his Tabula Rasa theatre, an "implicit and secret dramatization of buried universal themes within objective existence",<sup>65</sup> which "may be in the Festival this year".<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Harris, *Tumatumari*, pp. 114f.

<sup>59</sup> Harris comments further on 'tabula rasa' implied by "paradoxes of non-existence" that "has its roots in the archaeological strata of both dead and living civilizations" and alters the characters of 'comedy-of-manners' in the context of his discussion of metaphor in 'Metaphor and Myth', Sellick (ed.), *Myth and Metaphor*, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Harris, *Black Marsden*, p. 13

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 13

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 13

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 33

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 33

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 103

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 51. *Dimetos*, it will be remembered, was later to be commissioned for the Edinburgh festival.



Goodrich becomes increasingly involved with a journey guided by Knife through a devastated and deserted landscape called Namless inhabited by unseen survivors engaged in a guerrilla war, as he gradually loses his 'ruling head' in the form of his conscious autonomy. The representative of a civilization showered with material benefits, like a bridegroom at a Caribbean Indian wedding, he becomes terrified at what pressures might finally be brought to bear upon him to accept them as sufficient. At the same time, as Marsden seems depleted by Jennifer's secret 'pact' with Goodrich, the journey through Namless reaches a crisis when a mysterious warning played on the pipes may be taken either as a sign of imminent danger of ambush and death, or possibly as an enigmatic all-clear to pass through the defile to the plain beyond. Choosing to take it as a warning, Goodrich expels Marsden and the others, but the feeling remains that they will return and the defile will need to be attempted.

*The Angel at the Gate* can be regarded as this attempt. Its three epigraphs bear on the nature of annunciation of the numinous: Rilke's angel recalls powerlessness before the unbearable essence of beauty, Eliot's *Quartet* warns of the falsifying tendency of knowledge to impose patterns, and Eliade calls history, the time-bound event, a 'fall of the sacred'. But the sacred, though diminished, continues to manifest itself. A note by 'W.H.'<sup>67</sup> explains that the fiction is a reworking of the automatic writing of Mary Stella Holiday, and this in turn is associated with the genesis of Yeats' *A Vision* in George Yeats' automatic writing,<sup>68</sup> which places Yeats in congruity with both Marsden and 'W.H.'. Marsden in particular attains the status of a magus; his home in 'Angel Inn' is suggestive of his commerce with angels as a "larger-than-life psychiatrist and captain or sailor upon a ship of souls."<sup>69</sup> The novel is primarily concerned with the task and hypostases of this Gnostic seeker, the nature of his vision, and the particular temptations he is subject to. In particular the relationship between his spiritual conception of the world and the organic / material with which he interacts is

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<sup>67</sup> Paula Burnett, commenting on a similar use of the initials in *Jonestown*, points out that it "invites a parallelism with the famous dedication of Shakespeare's sonnets to 'Mr W.H.', their 'onlie begetter'." It thus combines the mystery of identity with the destabilization of the sense of authorial control and persona. Paula Burnett, 'Memory Theatre and the Maya', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2/1, 2 & 3, 2000, p. 221

<sup>68</sup> See pp. 155

<sup>69</sup> Harris, *The Angel at the Gate*, p. 73



presented in numerous subtly interrelated guises. It is also an account of an evolution of presences and absences suggesting a process of therapy.<sup>70</sup>

Just as Mary Stella Holiday immediately becomes dissociated into Stella (the wife of unemployed, drug-dealing Sebastian and mother of John) and Mary, Marsden's secretary, Marsden too has various autonomous aspects. Besides being the venerable father-figure Father Joseph Marsden, his Angel Inn is associated with a previous structure whose commerce of commodity and deprivation had included the auctioning of slaves. He is also the Anancy presence of lame Legba,<sup>71</sup> in the form of a limping youth he says has been attracted to his study by the bait of More's *Utopia*, for as a magus he is deeply implicated in a search for an ideal society, and echoes the social and economic philosopher Joseph Proudhon, whose non-violent anarchy of mutual debt and credit of labour grew out of his belief that reason could find the analogy between the mystical principles of the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition (which he had studied) and a functional fiction of supreme psychological value by which humans could live. Marsden is also Joseph Barber, an "inferior Marsden"<sup>72</sup> who disturbs and yet thrills Mary ("as if she felt Christ's fingers tug at her skirt") by his "devouring eyes upon her legs, her breasts, her body".<sup>73</sup>

Interacting dualities are not confined to any one character or situation, but extend throughout the book. Stella, with whose attempted suicide the book begins, though part of a fiction of Mary, is married to Sebastian. He "needs the same woman broken into wife and sister".<sup>74</sup> He in turn is an inversion of Marsden: "Marsden's consenting support for great spirituality had become in Sebastian a hollow tree, the hollow shadow of towering presence."<sup>75</sup> (It is an example of associative imagery: he sleeps 'like a log' and snores, but Mary dreams of his wonderful flute music.) Sebastian's addictions shadow Faustian

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<sup>70</sup> A fascinating attempt to harness the power of Harris's fiction in an intuitive and synchronistic use of the imagination for therapeutic purposes in psychiatric practice is described by Francine Juhasz Houtman in 'Catapult to Healing Dreaming', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 2/1, 2 & 3, 2000, pp. 122-33.

<sup>71</sup> Nathaniel Mackey shows how they are related: "An asymmetric equation that relates deficient leg to surplus legs, lack to multiplicity, brings a 'metaphysic of curative doubt' (AG 78) to bear upon appearances." He stresses both how these traits proliferate in the imagery, and how they are related to the winged sect of Hermes. (Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement*, pp. 257 & 245) In *Jonestown* Harris writes: "The lame Gods became divine spinners of tales *still awaiting another conversion into truth*." (Harris, *Jonestown*, p. 195 — author's emphasis)

<sup>72</sup> Harris, *The Angel at the Gate*, p. 60

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33



temptations; his inferior street world is an inverse alchemy in which his fiction — scripts, he claims, for the White City television centre — are 'prescriptions', drug deals, which he notes on toilet paper. Yet they, too, contain their ironic redemptive counterparts through synchronicity: Baby John is saved, just as he is about to swallow a bottle of sleeping pills, when one of Sebastian's 'jockeys' (he claims he bets) wakes Stella in the nick of time with the offer to 'jump her' in lieu of her husband's debt.

The interactions are spun out of a network of music and metonymy, so that literally it is Stella's (Mary's) favourite record, Armstrong singing songs from Brecht / Weill's *Threepenny Opera* (echoing the 18th century *Beggar's Opera* much as Angel Inn has its 18th century counterpart), that spawns a series of characters in parallel with the others. They are Mack the Knife, a sailor and philanderer who is Mary Stella's father, and her mother Jenny Diver. These are clearly related to Knife and Jennifer Gorgon from *Black Marsden*. There are also Lucy Brown and Sukey Tawdry. These 'family relations' from Gay's brothel and the search that gives rise to them are related equally to the blend of ecstasy and grief in Armstrong's jazz trumpet and the melancholy enchantment of Delius' classical tone poems.

These characters continually metamorphose from the 'container' of their music to set up other connections by name, association, sound etc. and with other events traceable backwards and forwards (as with *Tumatumari*) and through changes of scale to various levels of the book. So advertisements for visits to Chasnans, Proudhon's experimental watchmaking community in the Jura, and for treks to Mysore lead into the sea-trip to India in Marsden's bath to the wedding of Mack the Knife to his child-bride Lucy. Marsden points out::

Personal symbol was a rhythmic dimension of global wedding and funeral. Personal minute hand existed in the global clock to read events far and beyond oneself and to delineate a pattern of inimitable divisions of pain, of affection, of subtlety, of wisdom, of cunning. These divisions were part of an inscrutable, sometimes terrifying law of love.<sup>76</sup>

The Indian wedding carries forward the discussion of the spiritual and the material, because the bridegroom, under other circumstances, would be regarded as a child-abuser for marrying a twelve-year-old. Yet under Gandhi's influence he exercises restraint, and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 62



Khublall's love for Lucy, who dies young, becomes something beautiful, idealistic and tragic.<sup>77</sup>

The nature of the material becomes yet more complex in the figure of Jenny Diver, who metamorphoses into the destitute bag-woman outside the supermarket, Mother Diver. Also a diver emerging from the unconscious, she takes the form of a "luminous, half-mothering, half-consuming Diver shadow"<sup>78</sup> cast by the reading lamp on Sebastian in bed, and she comes from the "kingdom of mothers" that Goethe's Faust needs to consult in his alchemical labours. Mother Diver is a returning "Mother Care in a bleak recession"<sup>79</sup> responding to crisis, but also Mother Freedom "lurking everywhere in age-old fixation or diseased habit"<sup>80</sup> as she balances greed and appetite, excess with waste against bare necessity. These are the paradoxes of consumption for spiritual beings with needs in the material world. Patrolling a stretch of road between the church steeple and the subway, she wears a shawl stuffed with slivers of subsistence (morsels) of alchemical potential looking like scales or feathers, offering a view of modern economic exchange which is both absurd (beyond comedy) and outrageous (beyond tragedy), in which, by seeding doubt, she can instigate cure.

At this point in the novel an event occurs which removes Marsden from the scene, though by the fictional indeterminacy principle employed by Harris it is impossible to say exactly when or how he dies. The two prevalent versions are that he is hit by a bale fallen from a passing lorry, or that the bale narrowly misses him but causes him to have a heart attack. This bale, like the bath for the journey to India, is an everyday object that becomes charged with numinous meaning. It can also be a planet to travel to other universes: "Planet Bale is composed of a simple box. You could fill it with silks or dates if you wished."<sup>81</sup> As such it carries the values of its commodities, and is associated with Mother Diver. However, it is also a bale of straw, a 'baleful' cause of Marsden's death.<sup>82</sup> As a planet, it can be invested

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<sup>77</sup> The nearness of what seems to be irreconcilably opposite is signalled in the child's appreciation of metaphor which leads John to want to see "rich trains", which are not full-size counterparts of toy locomotives and trucks, but funeral processions of shiny limousines belonging to 'Millionaire Death' emerging, like some creature being born, with a "holy oblivious chauffeur" in what John takes to be a celebration. (Ibid., pp. 37f.) This can be read in the context of Harris's observation on a playing child's identification of a rose with the sun in 'Metaphor and Myth'

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 74

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 75

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 77

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 62

<sup>82</sup> It will be recalled that Faustus' horse turned into a bale of straw.



with angelic projections as was done with the macrocosm in the Gnostic / Hermetic tradition. However, both the bath and the bale are "precarious Utopian utensils in which to store water and food for the baptism of the small soul and the nourishment and protection of the dying body",<sup>83</sup> provisions for the soul's journey outside life. As a container, the bale is a metaphor for metaphors, whose different 'bird's eye view' perspective affects the three 'angels' who attend Marsden's funeral (as bystanders at the event) and into whom Marsden metamorphoses.

The three angels, according to a note (by W.H.?) 'immigrate' into the text. They are representatives of Europe (Wheeler), India (Khublall) and the Caribbean (Jackson). Wheeler represents single vision. As a Don Juan of science, he represents Faust's erotic entrapment in the material; for him each catastrophe induced by technology can be solved by a further insatiable step into technology. This theme is not developed further. The other two 'angels' represent opposite types of spirituality wrestling with the power of Eros: the ascetic bridegroom of a child bride (Khublall with his shaven head), and Jackson (with his Rasta locks) from a culture whose struggle for self-respect is bound up with the rival status of men and women, and the resultant promiscuity and irresponsible fatherhood.<sup>84</sup> The moment of the threatening bale (environmental disaster, nuclear disaster, economic disaster) is the seed of the conversion of their restricted views, for Jackson and Khublall the seed of a conversation stemming from their association with Marsden, for Marsden represents the legacy of their colonial educations,<sup>85</sup> and they now share the postcolonial, post-immigration backlash in a time of recession.<sup>86</sup> Both of them are 'educated night porters', now unemployed. In other words they are intellectuals used to coming to grips with the dark side of things. Three significant sections follow.

In Jackson's conversation with Khublall, first in the park where a ball is being punted around like a juggled globe (neither held nor falling), then in Jackson's room, whose bareness expresses psychological casualty, allowing power to fall away so that 'space begins to sail', Jackson takes up the constellation of characters around Mack the Knife as he

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<sup>83</sup> Harris, *The Angel at the Gate*, p. 84

<sup>84</sup> This theme, so notably taken up in the work of Earl Lovelace, also concerns many other contemporary Caribbean writers.

<sup>85</sup> "Your antecedents and my antecedents were taught by him in India, the West Indies, South America, USA, Africa, everywhere." (Harris, *The Angel at the Gate*, p. 91)



recounts his affair with Mack's daughter Sukey Tawdry. In this variation on Tenby's story in *Tumatumari*, Jackson meets Sukey in Marseille and accompanies her to Paris, where she performs as "a luscious strip-tease, a beautiful slut"<sup>87</sup> below Montmartre. Rag is the music for her dance, another example of "discrepant play" (Mackey) between frame and melody in its syncopations, 'ragging' imperial melodies, and it is also the rag hiding and revealing the "carnival body of bought-and-sold peoples around the globe consenting to their new, black and white masters".<sup>88</sup> Sukey's real name is Josephine, alluding to the legendary Josephine Baker, but also to Napoleon's Caribbean mistress, and she hides her vulnerability by the exposure of her body, an imperial sexual hubris which makes Jackson her horse: "And to become a creature of the furies — to be shorn of bombast — emperors had to regress into horses and through horses into clowns or daemons or angels."<sup>89</sup> The reversal of sexual roles leads to Jackson becoming the 'abandoned mother' of the child and the contradiction of the usual Caribbean stereotype.

The second notable section describes a cat in Jackson's garden playing with and eating a mouse. The passage emphasizes the distinctions and similarities between the organic processes of the natural, material world — to be taken up at greater length in the image of the Predator in *Jonestown* — and the material as lure and peril to the spiritual being:

to seek a way across the gulf between animal, divine priority (food, territory, hierarchy) and human, divine perception of innocence and guilt, human inevitable span that converts the food of lust into redemptive passion<sup>90</sup>

The third section, a visit by further incarnations of Lucy Brown, a Jamaican tea-lady, and her daughter Lucy, reveals young Lucy Brown as the 'eternal feminine' reviving Jackson's failing inspiration, showing how creation, the greatest prize, is obtained through the danger of "enchantment with the womb of nature". The girl's hardness, a sign of the times, is indifference which "only non-possessing love beyond given presences, given voices, given conventions, could begin to dissolve".<sup>91</sup>

At the time of Marsden's death (or disappearance), Mary finds that she is being strengthened as the figures of Mother Diver and Father Joseph recede. Joseph

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<sup>86</sup> "I sometimes believe I am threatened by the very forces I used to serve." (Ibid., p. 93)

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 94

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 96

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 99

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 115



metamorphoses instead into the 'walking' Angel Inn mirror — a kind of skrying stone — as an agent of altered destinies. Mary finds that the significance of Yeats' terms to her own automatic writing (and thus to Harris's fiction) become clear. The congruence between the imagery she finds there and the "hidden rhythms of her own unconscious" is the secret of the mirror, and Marsden's message to her through it is that "what one begins to hear and see needs to be accepted as partially arisen marvels of conception within still biased appearance, still biased voice, still biased sight, still biased sense, still biased nature".<sup>92</sup> The magic mirror is only a gateway, still perilous, not the goal itself. But as the multiple figures of Joseph and Jenny give spiritual regeneration to Mary, so Mary and the newly multiplied Joseph can conceive the holy child, who is at the same time the resurrected figure who "comes and goes", like Stella, and the divine inspiration of Pentecostal and alchemical fire. That conception is the fiction itself, a sacrament in which the reader must participate.

Without Marsden, Harris could hardly have approached Jonestown, but there are other novels of extraordinary stature on the way. One that obviously concerns this study directly is *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987), in which Faust appears as a character and is a presence underlying the whole work. It is not surprising that the story begins in familiar territory: that borderline between sea and land, the magic kingdom between consciousness and the unconscious referred to in 'Scarborough Fair' and claimed by both Marlowe's Faustus:

Why, the seigniory of Emden shall be mine (A-Text, II i 23)

and Goethe's Faust:

Die Lehn von grenzenlosem Strande (Part 2 IV i)<sup>93</sup>

Guyana, of course, is in a similar geographic position. From the air the ocean which brought conquerors and exiles, and the waves of the interior forests lapping up to the great continental escarpments seem to threaten the fragile cultivated coastal strip like a narrow beach which is home to the diversity of the Guyanese microcosm. This country, 'Old New Forest', is both a political organism with a capital in the city of Skull, and a 'magic wood', a body whose nerve-centre lies within the skull's bone vessel, the realm of Merlin, the seigniory of Faust.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 125

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 109

<sup>93</sup> "Reward of the unbounded strand" (my translation)



The narrator of *The Infinite Rehearsal* is a pork-knocker, a scarecrow figure who pans the rivers of the remote interior for gold,<sup>94</sup> part of the El Dorado equation (City of Gold? City of God?). Where this pork-knocker works, texts are hidden in apparent graves, which are in fact "a community of convertible soils and dreams",<sup>95</sup> which the narrator knows still to be as potent as the ghosts in De La Mare's 'The Listeners' who are roused by a Lonely Traveller knocking on the moonlight door. So the ghosts are not merely the long-drowned fishermen of the past; they are also masks which we, the readers of the present and future, can put on and wear: as Peter, as Emma, or as others addressed by Ghost between the water and the land, the unconscious and the conscious, and indeed as Ghost itself, the seeming presence of spirit perceptible through musical chords set up within the fabric of material reality, conjured from silence by the Traveller who has "kept his word".

As we have seen, Harris's characters, though discrete, are multiple, like the same archetype taking differing paths. Thus the narrator's grandfather, his "giant parent" as an aspect of ancestral tradition, was also a pork-knocker with a concern for ancient texts and so shares a basic identity with the narrator. The narrator's grandfather dies in 1945 — when Robin Redbreast Glass is born — of beriberi, a disease of one-sided malnutrition. Glass's grandfather disappears in the interior of the 'heartland'. There, like Harris as a surveyor, he has been both mathematician and poet, roaming the "palaces of the peacock orchid",<sup>96</sup> and from his art he bequeathes to his "Glass child in the golden woman my mother"<sup>97</sup> his vision of Faust seen in an environment in which the feminine and the masculine are reconciled:

He had pored over Goethe and Marlowe nights under an uncertain fuel lamp after labouring days in the creeks of the rainforests that ran through his barred consciousness. Ran like a woman's fluid constellation born of the reflected moon and the reflected sun. Golden offspring born of the inimitable self-penetration of the reflected moon and the reflected sun.<sup>98</sup>

This is the *coniunctio* of the alchemical process, so that in his grandfather's disintegration in 1945, the year of the bomb, the narrator can say: "I was a shadowy revised foetus and I

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<sup>94</sup> A waxwork model of a pork-knocker can be seen in the museum in Georgetown standing next to his barrel.

<sup>95</sup> Harris, *The Infinite Rehearsal*, in *The Carnival Trilogy*, p. 174

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185f.



gathered those limbs together into a giant dream, giant reconstitution and moved paradoxically upon a fragile arch."<sup>99</sup>

The ambivalent play of archetypes is again used in *The Infinite Rehearsal*. This time Robin Redbreast Glass, the narrator, and W. H. are intimately bound up in the autobiographical project of the novel, but are described as "adversaries". Similarly, Ulysses Frog makes his first appearance as the immigration officer who appears to be in opposition to Ghost, whom he seems to be chasing. As a 'customs' officer he is trying to force the newly emergent element from the unconscious into his "traditional system and network".<sup>100</sup> Frog's diamond eyes can penetrate and divide, cutting Glass, but they are also multi-faceted. Frog is also Ulysses, searching for home, and Don Juan, lost in the kaleidoscope of erotic desire. His companion is Calypso, whose slave-song of the market will be taken up carnivalistically by the band of the Tiresias Tigers. So Frog will become an awakening awareness of injustice in Tiger, shot by the police, and the blind seer and guide Tiresias who accompanies Robin down the Mountain of Folly to Skull for Emma's coronation. He is also the *Tiger*, the boat in which Emma and Peter (or Robin), Alice and Miriam were capsized and which, presumably, is the wreck and slave-ship from which Ghost arose. He illustrates the interweaving of the spirit Mercurius and the *prima materia* in the alchemical *opus*.

Faust himself is both Faustus and Mephistopheles, reintegrated but now ambivalent. Faust here has a dangerous aspect as a projection of hollow technologies:

Faust was the master of new-born ironies and abortive spirit. His kingdom bell spoke of simulated dialogue between hypothetical God and hypothetical Man. It spoke of the bleak conversion (bleak exploitation) of deprivation into puppetries unconscious of hollow being.<sup>101</sup>

His is the temptation of literalness which has a void at the heart of its machine; Faust is even said to have converted the sea into a machine (the unconscious as part of reductionist theory as the mere play of the drives), but there is a way of avoiding his mesmerizing power. Robin's grandfather had been prevented at the last moment from selling his soul when he heard the voices singing 'Stone Cold Dead in the Market'.<sup>102</sup> So compassion is necessary to outwit Faust, but that is not enough. Robin notices that although Faust holds

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 187

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 181. A frog is amphibious, and the webs of its feet associate it with the Trickster Spider.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 194

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 186. The text is from the ballad calypso 'Jumbi Jamboree'



his eye, "there was a crinkle of humour, even pitiful/pitiless understanding, at the edge of his lips."<sup>103</sup> Through this humour, which Robin employs in the bawdy texts from the seamy side of Carnival, combined with the 'wasteland poetry' of literary tradition, Robin is able to slip behind Faust's defences and use his ambivalence. By his simultaneous cry of laughter and of pain (a *cri de Merlin* which Harris in his introduction to the 1993 edition associates with the gull's cry and Quetzalcoatl) he avoids being touched by Faust and becoming a puppet on "the strings of prodigious dogma",<sup>104</sup> just as previously, after his abortive attempts to grasp, he has learnt to hear, and then to distinguish too, between the music he hears and the transitive musical pattern of which he is subject. He touches Faust instead to begin an infinite rehearsal of "the burden and the ecstasy of dreams"<sup>105</sup> At this point Faust seems to be laughing, "I am on your side once you *read* me properly. With a literate imagination Robin!"<sup>106</sup> The drug of material progress, the mistaking of the dance on the rod for the bite of life itself, can be avoided in order to make Robin's voice the "voice of revolutionary spirit".<sup>107</sup>

Partly at least this is possible through language, as Harris again demonstrates. To take one example, in a further rehearsal of material from *Tumatumari* in the 'play of the birth of history'<sup>108</sup> the axe falls first on the head of Sir Walter Raleigh. Yet the block on which he is executed is also an auction block. The metonymic potential of the word 'block' allows the base and death of conquistadorial power to become intimately associated with slavery's degradation and economic exchange, while the axe falling implies a closure in time on each headless self-mutilation as the innocent suffer, while new antagonistic blocks (blocs) are created. Each subsequent execution of a lie or injustice leads to the suffering of the innocent, as the innocent and the guilty are us. This is a 'block' to progress until "the Globe tumbles from the block to roll within the stars",<sup>109</sup> thus removing the block or Gordian knot in the fictional revisioning process. The alchemical symbolism, particularly that recalling the executions in *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*, will by now be familiar.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 193f.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 195

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 195

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 196

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 197

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 180



The dizzying variety of all this, which could potentially drown consciousness in a void of chaos, resolves itself instead into a chord of diverse but related tones in a seamless web of music built of time but remaining infinitely repeatable in the stillness beyond it where it vibrates.

The confrontation with Faust takes place in the second part of the novel, which deals with Robin's childhood from his time in the womb in 1945 until the wreck of the *Tiger* in 1961. This is preceded by the description of Ghost's arrival, and the confrontation with Frog. From Chapter 6 onwards the novel moves through the period after Robin's death on a journey through a series of locations linked metonymically with historical times and places, repeating and revising the events already described. He begins at the sea, the scene of the drowning, moves into the flatlands, and then over the bridge into Skull (simultaneously a map of Georgetown with the cranium formed in the angle of the Demerara and the Atlantic, or the image of the Metropolis, as well as the vessel for the brain). Skull becomes a faeryland of cheap power until it burns at Chernobyl, before it turns into a 'sophisticated concentration camp'. The entry into Skull is repeated, this time through a Dateless Day tunnel into Prospero Mall (named perhaps after the magician of dispossession, as the novel remains consistently aware of the political and economic realities of the postcolonial world). From there it is a short way to the ascent of the Mountain of Folly and the new meeting with Faust, though this time it is Robin's *alter ego* Peter who is climbing to Faust and in danger of his temptations. He escapes because Faust is momentarily distracted at hearing the name Peter. As Bone will do in *Jonestown*, he plays the part of another, an 'intimate stranger', and is able to escape Faust, find the true seam, and proceed to the meeting with Billionaire Death.

Frog sentences Robin to be sent to the bottom of the sea, and he is responsible for the blow by which Robin dies and the journey of the book begins. "It was so sharp I felt the stillness of the blade pour and coil within me. My head toppled into the Globe."<sup>110</sup> After that, in the theatre of the world, he relives the semantic journey towards Emma, beginning at

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 181

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 183



the end.<sup>111</sup> Robin promises Frog that he will rise again "into the map of heaven". Marlowe's Faustus would need to avoid selling his soul, and we have seen how Harris has addressed that question, but he also needs to revise the temporal limit of his pact. The Infinite Rehearsal is concerned with the many different kinds of death involved in that bargain.

There is, on the one hand, the death of consciousness, the continual threat of being drowned in the sea or immersed in the fascinations of the material, represented as Faust's temptation or the cheap power in Skull. On the other hand there is physical death, for example of the striker Tiger, striking against exploitation and malnutrition, who is shot by the police. He is said to have been manipulated by Faust, to have succumbed to "the lure and fallacy of black (or white) purity"<sup>112</sup> which becomes a death-wish, and is related to Peter's subsequent addiction to the bands. He dies spinning in the dance, so that his death, however real, although it becomes symbolic of all the millions of dead of numerous conflicts, is also a death of unconsciousness. Both are woven together, in a synchronistic pattern, just as Glass is to redeem the shattering of the bomb of 1945, or to define the dear power which will counteract the cheap power leading to Chernobyl; the clue being given in the painful nail of the true crucifixion which Emma describes as a counterbalance to the drifting fiery cross of smoke that marks the death of Faust's exploded rocket:

Well let me tell you, Robin, that the answer lay in a bird's cry, a bird's feather that pierces heaven and strings the music of laughter into the grief of rain. It was a nail, a half-rending sound, that rose from the sea, from Tiger's broken body, from the shattered boat, from the ships of all the navies of all the oceans, from a broken barrel, an invisible barrel on which Alice leaned into the crest of a wave. It was a nail. And it pierced me. I was nailed into the ground [ ... ] In such a nail that shatters one's prepossessions I knew the construction of a sound that echoed in the air and in the sea. It was the music of the priest, of the God of nature.<sup>113</sup>

This moves Robin's perception on to see something of the relationship between love and death, a vibration between two sorts of music, parallel but unlike each other, "Emma's dear music of mystery and grace and the cheap music of the electric machine in the circus of hell".<sup>114</sup> But it too becomes part of Faust's fascination, this time in the shape of Billionaire Death. Whereas before the mask of parallel and adversarial identity was needed in order to outwit Faust, to avoid the fascination of Billionaire Death and his diamond eyes it is Emma's

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<sup>111</sup> As with the death of Donne at the inception of *Palace of the Peacock*, or the movement of *Jonestown* away from the clearing of death, it is an echo of Eliot's *Quartets*: "In my end is my beginning".

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239



(the anima's) vision of love which is required, so that in reply to Death's assertion that "Life is blind spirit, death is love" he can reply,

One needs to convert love's death wish into generations that are capable of such intimate rapport with one another's frailties that love leads them *through* death not *into* oblivion's space adventure. Life leads them into spirit as if the passage through spirit is the infinity of invisible spirit itself.<sup>115</sup>

For this to be possible, however, the nature of death itself needs to be reinvestigated. For it is pointed out that death does not need to buy lives. Through the deaths of the innocent, accidental deaths, disastrous deaths, senseless deaths of all kinds, the ancient religious questions of the nature of suffering must be posed. It will be recalled that for the Gnostics the relationship between love and death was central. Harris uses the image of the stone plucked from the hillside to kill an innocent bystander during a riot in Jamaica; the stone is balanced on death's scales with Alice's ring. This ring is the sense of the infinite and of passage through, gold outside of an imperishable substance, with tiny diamonds inside to cut and to see, which is also the pork-knocker's barrel and the hole which kills Tiger. The balance of the two becomes part of the organic nature of Beast, or of living itself, which is dependent on death. In a mystical vision he is able to see the drowned sailors cannibalizing the body of Beast in the female form of Miriam to create an instrument of music:

The bone-sailors in their dance, in eating the fish, had subtly cannibalized the spectre of death and eaten into the gravity — or the anti-gravity — of Miriam's flesh, animal flesh, female flesh. Eaten into the dance and into themselves as well, into their male bone and acquired in consequence a crack or tooth-mark, a sparkling intensity or flute of soul.<sup>116</sup>

So a musical chord is created which allows us to gauge the visionary against the material, and to sense the values and the dangers of both.

Here the thread through the holes in life is spun for the seamless garment that Emma is to wear at the coronation, which comes from following the seam that allows escape from Faust and the fascination of projections. Tiresias explains that it is also the seed or semen of the true resurrection: "For how can there be a true resurrection without a true balance between opposites by which we measure the human in the divine, the divine in the human?"<sup>117</sup> Ghost elaborates in the postscript:

Beast's thread is the seamless garment one carries in ailing nature yet seeks from another source (a healing or healed source) upon the waters of spirit. Carries through arts of sorrow towards the consummation of bliss.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 239f.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 249

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 253



How to find a true balance between such carrying in vessels of nature and such seeking from vessels of spirit?<sup>118</sup>

In redefining Faustian Humanity's task in this way, it becomes clear that the failure chronicled by Marlowe, or the alchemical possibilities intuited in Goethe, are drawn by Harris, in a further act of an ongoing rehearsal in a theatre called 'The Crest of a Wave' (where the unconscious is raised to consciousness, the same sea and different, the same coast and new) into an elaboration of the same task that constantly needs to be taken up, the task of the magician on that impossible shore where the impossible seed is to be sown and harvested:

Tell her to make me a cambric shirt  
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme,  
Without any seam or needlework  
Then she'll be a true love of mine.<sup>119</sup>

But alas the stone begins to drift away from the ring into the Night of civilization. As they drift, the thread one carries towards the thread one seeks, appears to be broken or lost.<sup>120</sup>

It is indeed an impossible kingdom; the admonitory confession with which the novel begins: "The values of a civilization — the hope for a universally just society, for the attainment of the heart and mind of love, the genius of care — are an impossible dream..."<sup>121</sup> is a reminder that Jonah Jones, in *Jonestown*, seeking to follow that white whale of a dream beyond the range of nuclear holocaust, incurred the "irony that multiplies the purse strings of Billionaire Death".<sup>122</sup> It is the very impossibility of the dream that prompts and gives reality to the creative imagination whose infinite rehearsal seems to provide our cue.

*Jonestown*, the culmination to date of Harris's exploratory alchemy, conforms to the Axiom of Maria Prophetissa: "One becomes two, two becomes three, and out of the third comes the one as the fourth."<sup>123</sup> In what Harris terms a "composite epic"<sup>124</sup> Francisco Bone

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 259

<sup>119</sup> Paula Burnett draws attention to a similar lover's task motif in the Mayan legends Popol Vuh, where "the mother-to-be of the sacred twins is tested by her mother-in-law by being made to fill a net with maize when only one cornstalk remains to be harvested. ('Memory Theatre and the Maya', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2/1,2 & 3, 2000, p. 229

<sup>120</sup> Harris, *The Carnival Trilogy*, p. 259

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 173

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 259

<sup>123</sup> Jung, 'Psychology and Alchemy', *Collected Works* 12, p. 23. Jung comments that this axiom "runs like a *leit-motiv* throughout almost the whole of the lifetime of alchemy, extending over more than seventeen centuries". Jung brings this ecstatic cry, like a *cri de Merlin*, with its associated images in Goethe's *Faust*, into his analysis of one of Pauli's dreams. (Ibid., p. 160)

<sup>124</sup> Harris, *Jonestown*, p. 5 & *passim*



undertakes a Gnostic pilgrimage from the Day of the Dead,<sup>125</sup> the holocaust of the Reverend Jim Jones's Jonestown community in November, 1978,<sup>126</sup> backwards and forwards in time, weaving together the myths and epics of diverse cultures to show how the scattered light split and shattered from the bundle of mirrors that is crystalline archetype has been portrayed in different times and places. It is in this sense a profoundly cross-cultural, living process, not a reflection of dead tradition or irredeemable historical moment.

'One becomes two' because each person and thing carries its adversarial complementary or compensatory twin. For example Bone, the survivor of Jonestown, must be reconciled with his skeleton-twin, who has died and been buried beneath piles of newspapers, representing single-vision commentary on the tragedy. Bone is also Deacon; the fingers with which Deacon shoots Jones are sliced from Bone's hand, and the acceptance of their twinship is a major component of Bone's task. It is only through one's twin and the apparently contradictory point of view shared with the twin that true sight becomes possible. It is significant how often expressions of surprise are used in the novel as the narrator discovers such unexpected and discrepant twinships.

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<sup>125</sup> The term carries connotations of the Mexican pre-columbian Carnival ceremony of skeletons, which features in Lowry's *Under the Volcano*.

<sup>126</sup> The supreme synchronicity is that Harris's novel about the horror that ended the utopian Jonestown community ("the self-inflicted holocaust engineered by a charismatic cult leader" - Harris, *Jonestown*, p. 3) — so symptomatic of the many other holocausts that preceded it, and so difficult for a disbelieving world to recognize as an image of itself — is only a development of, but not different in kind to, the unitary theme of the trials of the imagination which he has always pursued. It is convincing proof of Harris's unswerving faithfulness to reality.

The many parallels and congruities between Harris's work and the life and death of Jim Jones can be followed in David Chichester's *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the People's Temple, and Jonestown*. From his birth in a town dedicated to coffin-making, the son of a KKK sympathizer and a factory worker whose dead mother appeared in a vision to announce a messiah, Jones moved to take on Father Divine's mantle of God in a living body, rejecting the conventional deity. His People's Temple moved to Redwood Valley, near San Francisco, in the mid-1960s, and achieved considerable successes — Jones was given the Martin Luther King Jr Humanitarian of the Year award in 1977 — before a combination of fear of nuclear holocaust and financial scandal drove him to emigrate with most of the community to the rain forest of Guyana, in co-operation with Guyana's President Forbes Burnham. Doubt still reigns over whether this was a utopian family in which Jones was the 'Daddy God' and shamanic healer and his members 'baby gods', or a coercive prison brainwashed by continual 'white nights' of suicide rehearsals. Arguments about the true paternity of a child claimed to be Jones's son were part of the chain of events leading to the ambush of the visiting Congressman Ryan and the subsequent massacres and suicides which shocked the world's media. When the bodies were discovered: "Everyone else in Jonestown, not just the black members of the community, had turned completely black, apparently through the effects of the poison; but Jones, as [Odell] Rhodes later recalled, had 'turned into what he hated most. He was white. To me, he looked about the whitest thing I ever saw'." (p. 161) The bodies, flown back to the US, were treated like the victims of disease, 'a symbolic exorcism of a horrible, incomprehensible otherness in American collective unconsciousness'. A different view, seeing the events as symptomatic of a malaise within Guyanese society and the aftermath of the trends of the 1960s, is given by Shiva Naipaul in *Black and White*.



The twinship theme is handled with superb skill in its treatment of all events and characters as simultaneously part of a microcosm and macrocosm — 'what is above is the same as what is below' — which is another way of expressing that they are simultaneously within parallel universes. The most spectacular and graphic illustration of this is the description of the first meeting of Deacon and Marie in the first rains on the savannah after the drought. Two schoolchildren who have taken off their clothes in the rain are simultaneously sexual beings experiencing the overwhelming force of erotic passion, and hero and goddess, fallen angel<sup>127</sup> and immortal, nourishing but destructive virgin muse, from whose hair Deacon fashions a lasso or whip to control the horses of the moon he has caused to materialize out of a dance, on which ride the Giants of Chaos at his command;<sup>128</sup> these are the coercive empires and militaristic scourges of god, whether Genghis Khan or Cortez, from Chichén Itzá or Berlin, fashioned out of manipulated populations of submissive and enslaved peoples; Deacon leads them into a coffin, which is also a sluice, and his lasso is a sinuous watercourse forming part of a drainage scheme,<sup>129</sup> "reined-in animal passion, curbed and manifest in engineering, wilderness genius".<sup>130</sup> The passage is an illustration of the alchemical power of metonymy, the trickster power of Mercurius.

That is why, in the novel, the scene appears in Mr Mageye's camera. Mr Mageye is related to Marsden (and the camera to Angel Inn mirror), a both older and younger Mercurius who combines the role of cosmic jester with that of teacher and guide, and is simultaneously himself the Magus, the Gnostic seeker<sup>131</sup> — *prima materia*, mercury and

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<sup>127</sup> Deacon is clearly related to Lucifer and Mephistopheles, the Faustian daemon.

<sup>128</sup> One could compare this with the Gnostic / Hermetic vision of the potential of humanity expressed by Pico della Mirandola. Elsewhere Harris connects this section with the legends of Heracles, who strangled serpents in his cradle, and Hermes (Mercurius), who stole Apollo's horses when still an infant. These figures become a "vessel of tribes" as the bone flute is a vessel of tribes. The whole section becomes a vessel or organ transcending the limits of individual existence, but no less fully that existence at the same time. (Harris, 'Ways to Enjoy Literature', Debusscher & Maufort (eds) *Union in Partition. Essays in Honour of Jeanne Delbaere*, p. 204.

<sup>129</sup> Mr Mageye points out that this drainage scheme, abandoned in 1939, would have enclosed grazing land. Bone later explains that a "redistributive alliance of canals, drainage, and other works orchestrated into the living landscape" (p. 172) could have been used to prevent the rule of chaos, the drainage of rich plantations to the disadvantage of the frequently flooding small farms.

<sup>130</sup> Harris, *Jonestown*, p. 64. A key to the understanding of the multi-dimensionality of this whole passage (pp. 58-67) might be found in Sibelius' Seventh Symphony, whose single movement combines the frenetic steps of a Mozart scherzo with the long-breathing adagio of Bruckner in such a way that each emerges from the other with no perceptible boundary, the scurrying of ants or cars with the looping pattern of motorways seen from the air into the majesty of earthrise seen from the moon.

<sup>131</sup> The name 'Mageye' appears to combine Magus with 'eye' (or major I), the third eye of wisdom possessed by Siva.



material of the *lapis* — while his camera which can see into the past and the future is the metonymic, creative imagination.

'Two becomes three', according to the axiom. The twinship of Bone and Deacon, which can be traced back to the Dreamer and Donne, multiple and single vision, combines in the founder of Jonestown, Jonah Jones himself. The triad was formed in 1970s San Francisco, where Jones's 'Church of Eternity' or 'Conquest Mission' grew up out of the reified ideals of the 1960s resurgence of the imagination. Jones is described as a twin of the Prisoner God,<sup>132</sup> punningly incarcerated on Devil's Isle, and Harris has commented: "the various prisoner-gods are demiurges,"<sup>133</sup> in other words they become baleful powers from the self against whom the Gnostic seeker must rebel to become free.<sup>134</sup> Jonah Jones is Jonah, the flawed and hubristic biblical prophet who is swallowed by the Leviathan fish or whale, but also the monomaniacal Ahab pursuing the great white whale to its and his own destruction.<sup>135</sup>

In simultaneous equations or pacts the central triadic identity of Jones, Deacon (right-hand man) and Bone (left-hand man) as the founders of utopian Jonestown emerges. Part of Bone's task is to recognize their relatedness in spite of oppositions while yet distinguishing their differences. In other words the synthetic powers of the unconscious must be combined with the analytic tools of consciousness. Over against this male triad is the female triad of the three virgin Maries, each of whom is related to the males (focusing on Bone) as anima, mother or muse. Their presence is sensually traced within the material world, but they carry reverberations of the dimensions of archetypal grandeur from which their numinosity shines. The Virgin of Albuoytown is predominantly the protective mother, though she too can be a 'Blessed Fury'. The leather she sells will carry the poor to the slaughter as cattle. Through her 'marriage' to the eighteenth-century French slaveowner, a conquistadorial albeit

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<sup>132</sup> "Jonah Jones was the Prisoner's perverse twin-brother!" (Harris, *Jonestown*, p. 114). The archetype, if projected and petrified into a rigid structure, becomes a prisoner of its own shadow-qualities.

<sup>133</sup> Harris, 'Ways to Enjoy Literature', Debusscher & Maufort (eds) *Union in Partition. Essays in Honour of Jeanne Delbaere*, p. 207

<sup>134</sup> Here it becomes clear how he himself carries the seed of the perversion of spirit into reified power and static frame; besides the fate of conventional religions one might consider how Newton, a Gnostic seeker, becomes the imprisoning power against whom Blake rebels.

<sup>135</sup> This institutes a number of allusions to Melville's *Moby-Dick*, among which one might mention the constellations of characters: the 'soothing savage' Queequeg and the 'right-minded' mate Starbuck, and Ishmael, who survives the vortex buoyed up on Queequeg's coffin to tell the story: "And only I am escaped



repentant power, she stresses a European connection, but is also threatened by the predatory beggar during Carnival. Bone, as her son, is also the Frenchman's son and brother.<sup>136</sup> The French reference relates her to Marie Antoinette, the bride of Jones, whose child in the clearing Bone also is; she in turn becomes the animal goddess Circe, who can turn men into swine, showing Bone a vision of cosmic copulation during which the hubris of male sexuality is sliced and relativized. Marie of Port Mourant, Deacon's bride, is also Bone's when he returns to celebrate the marriage in Deacon's mask. She is also the mother of the child Lazarus, and Bone himself is also Lazarus and bears his tattoo, being a poor survivor of death. Marie is Kali too, the death goddess, so each of these anima figures is a perilous muse combining inspiration and dread, both angel and fury. Ariel was also the Harpy at the banquet.

This 'Wilderness Marie', by birth a goddess, is cared for by the magus doctor and helps tend the sick in the hospital. One of her ailing patients is a huntsman who is an aspect of the Christ archetype. He has a dog or lamb and hunts the Predator,<sup>137</sup> which is not death but the beauty and cruelty of nature itself. Bone is saved from the Predator when the huntsman holds it at bay in a net, but it is explained to him that to desire the Predator's death would be his own. This mystical interdependence of life and death explains the significance of the huntsman as Christ. It is only through the process of Bone's development that the Predator changes from its threatening tiger or cat form (as Jones or the beggar murderer) to the beautiful skin he is left by Mr Mageye as celestial parchment. The huntsman's net, like Deacon's lasso, is made of a hair from Marie's head. Thought provoked by the anima encloses Predator and prey in a new-found totality, but there is a difference between them in spite of their mutual dependence. Mr Mageye provides the answer: "The difference lies in prayer."<sup>138</sup> It is a Magus jester's pun. The net is the mysterious and numinous power of language to create reality beyond *on kai me on*:

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alone to tell thee," echoing the messengers of holocaust to Job: "and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." (*Job* 1, 15, 16, 17 & 19)

<sup>136</sup> The French landowner, having accidentally killed his brother, had portraits painted showing himself aging while the ageless brother gradually becomes his son. This is an interesting parallel to Plunkett and the poet's father in Walcott's *Omeros*.

<sup>137</sup> This is a clear allusion to Blake: "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?"

<sup>138</sup> Harris, *Jonestown*, p. 100



When music and unspoken prayer animate language, all proportionalities of being and non-being, genesis and history, are subject to a re-visionary focus.<sup>139</sup>

This precept is identical to the principles of Marsilio Ficino's ceremonial magic. Mr Mageye continues:

'Unspoken prayer matches hidden texts. One prays that one is free to offer one's body to another in sacramental love. One prays for such freedom.'

'And the Predator?'

'The Predator draws blood. The blood of lust.'<sup>140</sup>

According to the axiom, triads are incomplete. "Out of the third comes the one as the fourth." I would suggest tentatively<sup>141</sup> that the fourth is bound up with the Predator and with the virgin ship itself,<sup>142</sup> the vessel in which Bone's odyssey takes place, thus relating it intimately to the vessel and river whose identity with the muse Mariella has been observed in *Palace of the Peacock*. This fourth is the only way of completing the male triad of Jones, Deacon and Bone and consummating the *hierosgamos* or sacred marriage of the alchemical opus with the virgin and dread goddesses, who also thus achieve completion. The trickster and truth-maker Mercurius,<sup>143</sup> who is the means of bringing these elements together, is Mr Mageye, but he too is triadic in character, being the three magi of teacher, doctor and inspector, each of whom provides a special gift or key for a vital stage in Bone's journey. Mr Mageye, too, must disappear to bring the work to fruition.

The goal of the *opus* is the achievement of the philosopher's stone, true gold, without the loss of the soul. In *Jonestown* this is represented by Bone's voluntary acceptance of the mask of Deacon, with the consequence that the child Lazarus may survive the touch of the seeker of Roraima's wealth. It is the soul standing not falling, but paradoxically the judgement that Bone / Deacon must accept is to trust himself to fall.<sup>144</sup> Like Dimetos, he

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 97

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 100

<sup>141</sup> The reason for my caution is that Harris makes a different suggestion. According to him: "the fourth Roraima goddess is not a *death* goddess but a dread goddess. Dread in that she implies a Compassion, animal and divine, which we can scarcely bear to contemplate. It lies in obscurity. It is beyond the imperatives and tenets of art, it is 'the farthestmost evolution Mind may begin to contemplate'." (Harris, 'Psyche and Space' in Durix (ed.), *Theory and Literary Creation*, p. 16 — author's emphases). This is not necessarily a contradiction.

<sup>142</sup> The virgin ship is the fiction, a craft in the new sacrament of fertile ecstasy bearing the foetus of consciousness through a turbulent genesis.

<sup>143</sup> "On every frontier that we seek to cross one needs to balance truth-makers, or truth-sayers, with tricksters. Frontiers are obdurate, believe me." Harris, *Jonestown*, p. 150

<sup>144</sup> He accepts with the words; "I am here before you. I have nothing. I am poor. Judge me. It is no accident." (Ibid., p. 233) The acknowledgement of synchronistic connection is not abandonment to an external fate, but the recognition that he is part of the texture of all things, the skin of the Predator.



must abandon himself and wait. While he gives himself simultaneously to the Predator, as part of the pagan body of the Predator, he is held in the huntsman's gleaming web of connections in which being and non-being are resolved (*aufgehoben*) in sight, however far removed, of the "unfathomable body of the Creator",<sup>145</sup> or true, absent God within the self and beyond the stars.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 234





26. Georgetown, Guyana,  
from the air



27. Flooding on the Corentyne,  
Guyana



28. Kaieteur Falls, Guyana



# Epilogue

## Pegasus

There's nothing that doesn't suit you  
any mood any costume  
just flatters the sheen of your body  
the grace of your soul  
the secret touch of your hold

You make a world in your image  
beneath you my back  
speeding over the stubble  
with your mind to guide me  
my wings take the air

Hooked to that lure I can't doubt  
the flight to the eye of the day  
I can't see how my body is poised  
in your vision or the distance  
between my feet and the ground

This study began in a theatre that was a school. What happened there was a rehearsal of the mask of Faustus. I myself tried on the mask of an attendant lord, the carnival cardinal, knight and Duke of Vanholt, and watched Faustus duel with Mephistopheles. Images to conjure with! In the mask of Prospero I broke my staff to give freedom to fascinating Ariel. There is much to be learnt about flying and falling. But I've taken instruction too from the Magi, and tried to pass on the lesson in these pages. Yeats, writing about magic, said, "I look at what I have written with some alarm, for I have told more of the ancient secret than many among my fellow-students think it right to tell."<sup>1</sup> But perhaps now is the time for it to be told more widely. We owe it to the fragile world that depends on our conception of it.

When the actor playing Prospero leaves the stage, is he a magician, or just an actor? He goes with the words, an apt *envoi*:

*As you from crimes would pardon'd be  
Let your indulgence set me free.*

*Exit.*

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<sup>1</sup> Yeats, 'Magic', *Collected Works* VII, p. 52



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